BORGES'S MEDIEVAL IBERIA

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how and why famed Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges conjures up images of Medieval Iberia in the vast majority of his anthologies of essays, poems and stories. Following an introduction to Borges's attitude to the multiple and often contradictory appropriations of Medieval Iberia in the Spanish-speaking world of his day, it considers the philological and postcolonial implications of Borges's references to al-Andalus and Sepharad. Relying on New Philology as defined by Karla Mallette and on postcolonial approaches to medievalisms of the postcolonial world, *Borges's Medieval Iberia* offers a contribution to the mostly unchartered territory of critical approaches to the uses of medievalisms in twentieth-century Argentina.

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A Note on Translation, Spelling and Terminology

All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

In order to facilitate the reading of the dissertation, I use the version of the foreign word that I assume is more accessible to the reader. I use Reconquest rather than Reconquista, Koran rather than Qur'an (or Quran), and Kabbalah rather than Kabbala (or Cabala, or Kabala). Koran is used in e.g. Cook, and Kabbalah is used in Scholem and Alazraki, for example. I have chosen to, in general, avoid the use of diacritics or accent marks whenever possible: I use Cordoba rather than Córdoba, Count Julian rather than Count Julián, Volk rather than völk. When choosing an English equivalent, I have opted for the most conventional English version. Thus, Asín Palacios will be Asín (as in Mallette 41-4) and Ibn Rushd will be Averroes.

I will indistinctly use the terms "Catholicism" and "Christianity," and "Castilian" and "Spanish." The dissertation, however, engages with the specific branch of Christianity that is Roman Apostolic Catholicism, and with the specific language which was born in Castile and which is now spoken in Borges's native Argentina. Even when I use the words "Christianity" and "Spanish," it should be understood that I am referring to "Catholicism" and "Castilian" respectively.

I will avoid the word "Reconquest," as in Wacks. I use the term al-Andalus when referring to Arabic-speaking culture and Sepharad when alluding to Hebrew-speaking culture. Al-Andalus will be referred to with the Arabic article *al* assimilated into the name, and ha-Sepharad will be called simply Sepharad because while it is conventional to refer to al-Andalus this is not the case with ha-Sepharad. I will use Sepharad rather than Sefarad as in Bejarano and Aizenberg, and Elkin, for example.

As much as possible, I will also steer clear from the term “medieval Spain.” In some circumstances, however, I find that this term is appropriate—as, for instance, when discussing how Borges connects the nation Spain with medieval history. But in general I will avoid the nationalistic implications of “medieval Spain” as if the nation could be superimposed in the past of the territory in which “Spain” happened to develop. For the same reason, I will try, as much as possible, to not refer to medieval Spanish or Andalusian culture or peoples, and instead use the term “Andalusi.” This adjective is used to describe the provenance of the cultural practices and inhabitants of al-Andalus by Menocal and Wacks, for example.

I am aware, however, that whatever term I choose will carry ideological connotations. Even the seemingly neutral “Medieval Iberia” still includes within it the ideas of “Iberia” and of the “medieval.” Some scholars, as L. P. Harvey, think that “Iberians” is an “expression limited to ancient history, or to the contrived ecumenism of modern times” (2-3). The adjective “medieval” is even more problematic, as it is intricately tied with the undoubtly non-neutral term “modernity,” and it encompasses a ten-centuries-long era of European history, both idealized as the origins of European nations and reviled as the “Dark Ages” of savagery and ignorance.

Introduction: Borges's Unacknowledged Medieval Iberia

During the twentieth century, the sons and daughters of Ashkenazi Jews who had immigrated to Argentina were growing up. They spoke Yiddish at home and Spanish everywhere else. They became farmers, businessmen, psychoanalysts, doctors, philologists, poets and lawyers. They had no reason to suspect that they descended from the Jews who were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492. Their last names were not Abravanel, Acevedo or Pinelo—they were Grümberg or Gerchunoff. Yet, Medieval Iberia, or more precisely Sepharad—the name given to Medieval Iberia in Hebrew—loomed large over their poetic output. In the 1960s, an Argentine poet of Ashkenazi origin, Carlos Grünberg (1903-1968), found his Sepharad "between the Andes and the River Plate," that is, in the territory of Argentina ("Junto a un Río de Babel" 257).[1] His poetry countered the then-dominant rhetorical perspective, promoted by elites such as the Presidents of the National Library and Ministers of Education, which viewed all Argentines as spiritual heirs of Spanish inquisitors and reconquerors. These cultural forces positioned Medieval Iberia as a site of the gradual excision of the evils of Islam and Judaism from Spain.

To some Argentines, the Middle Ages of the territory we now call Spain is defined by the Hebrew-speaking Sepharad; to others, it is framed by the Castilian-speaking *Reconquista* or Reconquest. Others prefer to use the Arabic word al-Andalus, which references either the Vandals or the wild Atlantic (Vallvé, *La división* 55; Dodds 14). The words "Sepharad," "Reconquest" and "al-Andalus," in Hebrew, Castilian and Arabic, respectively, carry ideologically charged assumptions. The most widely used and criticized of these terms is Reconquest, which implies a war to eject Muslims, and concomitantly assumes that the eight

[1] "Sefarad…entre los Andes y el Plata" (Grünberg, "Junto a un Río de Babel" 257).

centuries of Muslim rule in the Peninsula, from 711 CE to 1492, was a time of arrested development—an anomalous hiccup in the otherwise Latin, Castilian and exclusively Catholic Spain (Dodds 302; Wacks, *Framing* 15-20, 136-45). The idea of a Reconquest also assumes that the cultural practices we associate with the world of Islam—the use of Arabic characters in writing, for instance—somehow banished in 1492, when in actuality many of the Muslims who converted to Christianity after that year kept those cultural practices for a long time after the Muslims lost Granada in 1492. These cultural practices were so visible and were so associated with the world of Islam that in 1609 some found it justifiable to expel those who practiced them—even though they were Christians. The term Reconquest, in other words, is misleading in that it assumes a drastic change in 1492. Most importantly, it has been often used to buttress a fundamentalist version of Christianity and is at odds with the more moderate approach taken by those historians and philologists (Christians or otherwise) who denounced the Inquisition and embraced or at least acknowledged the existence of Spain's Arabic past.

Both the inclusive and exclusionary definitions of Medieval Iberia in twentieth-century Argentina are variations of longstanding global conventions. The Argentine longing for Sepharad is but one instance of a time-honored and well-studied trope employed by Jewish communities from around the globe since the 1492 expulsion, and is part of a broad tendency to imagine Medieval Iberia as a time and place in which religions and languages coexist in relative peace—a tendency that sometimes results in Medieval Iberia being idealized to an unrealistic degree. The conventional Argentine appropriation of the Reconquest represents a different, and similarly time-honored, convention of bolstering stringent and exclusionary forms of nationalism and religious fanaticism. The identification of the Middle Ages with the Latin Christian Middle Ages, and its attendant exclusion of Semitic languages and religions, is deeply entrenched in

exclusionary forms of European medievalisms or evocations of the "medieval." This vision of the Middle Ages underlies the ingrained habit to either deny or overlook the porousness of medieval boundaries and the connections between Latin, Aramaic, Hebrew and Arabic poetry and scholarship.

To the medievalist—and even to the historian, theologist or Argentine-Ashkenazi Rabbi—the appropriation of the Middle Ages for both inclusionary and fundamentalist purposes is well understood. Literary scholars, however, have only recently started to pay attention to the particularities, implications and purposes for which Argentine medievalisms were deployed during the twentieth century. These medievalisms are usually mentioned in passing within volumes about other topics, like studies on the Jews of Latin America or on the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986). Specialists point out that in twentieth-century Argentina, the evocation of the Reconquest served to buttress anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant, fascist and, during the Second World War, pro-Axis views (Elkin 1; Bell-Villada 292; Aizenberg, *Books* 9). When, at the turn of the century, the once-coveted European immigration became a reality, and Ashkenazi Jews and Italians were suddenly roaming the streets of Buenos Aires and creating settlements all around the country, some Argentines began to look at the Reconquest era with a nostalgic gaze—one that wrote a mono-religious, mono-cultural, and exclusively Castilian and Catholic version of Medieval Iberia onto the premodernity of Argentina.

Scholars also identify particular instances of twentieth-century appropriations of Medieval Iberia for multicultural purposes. Specialists on Judaism read the allusions to Sepharad in poems by Ashkenazi-Argentine Jews as examples of the Argentine version of "neo-Sephardism," which is defined as a tendency of Argentine Jews of all origins to identify with Jews of the Iberian Peninsula (Aizenberg, *Books* 54-5). The main purpose of neo-Sephardism is

to adapt to Argentine society and, more broadly, to the entire Spanish-speaking world, while simultaneously countering anti-Semitic and anti-immigration narratives.

Another use of Medieval Iberia as a metaphor for multiculturalism comes in the form of the embrace of Spain's Arabic-speaking past. While during the nineteenth century Spain's "Moorish" history was mostly silenced or rejected, an attitude shift emerged during the twentieth century (Taboada 132). The novelist Enrique Larreta (1875-1961) and the famed essayist and poet Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938) were among the twentieth-century Argentine intellectuals who brought to the surface a relatively inclusionary image of Spain's Arab past. The protagonist of Larreta's best-selling novel *La Gloria de Don Ramiro* (*The Glory of Don Ramiro*) (1908), which critiques Spain's obsession with blood purity, is the son of a "Moor" who is mistakenly convinced of his unadulterated Christian lineage. Eight years after the publication of this novel, in his highly influential 1916 lectures on Argentine literature, Lugones noted similarities between "Arabs" and Argentine gauchos—a nomadic rural figure he proposes as Argentina's epic hero. Lugones also wrote articles about the Arabic origin of certain Hispano-American words. During the 2000s, scholars expose shortcomings in the multiculturalism of both Larreta and Lugones. In her volume *Between Argentines and Arabs: Argentine Orientalism, Arab Immigrants and the Writing of Identity* (2006), Christina Civantos observes that Larreta's "representations of the East are…problematically static" (90). In his article "'Reconquista' and the 'Three Religion Spain' in Latin American Thought" (2009), the cultural historian Hernán Taboada characterizes Lugones's attitude as a "concession" to multiculturalism and as "merely rhetorical" (132). He even implies that Lugones's embrace of medieval Spain might have been a covert means to discriminate against immigrants (132-3)—a suggestion that Civantos also makes about Larreta (90). Despite their limitations and inadequacies, however, Larreta's and Lugones's

works form part of a trend in which the Arabic presence in Medieval Iberia is not overlooked, silenced or perceived as exclusively detrimental to Spain or Argentina.

This dissertation will engage with the particular medievalism of Borges, the most renowned Argentine writer of the twentieth century. Borges was born in Buenos Aires in 1899, and lived there until the age of fourteen, at which time he traveled with his family to Geneva. After he turned nineteen, the Borgeses moved to Spain for a few years. They stayed in Barcelona for a couple of months before departing for the Mediterranean island of Majorca, where they resided for "nearly a year" (Borges, "An Autobiographical Essay" 149).[2] Borges's biographer Edwin Williamson reports that the Borgeses "were enchanted by the city, especially by the historic quarter, with its stately cathedral and the old Moorish castle La Almudaina overlooking the sea" (68). The Borgeses then spent the winter of 1919-20 in Seville, after which they stayed in Madrid for a few months. At some point in this trip to Spain they visited the Alhambra. It is in this particular region—in the territories of al-Andalus and Sepharad—where Borges fantasizes about his Sephardic origins (Borges, *Cartas del Fervor* 111, 170) and where he first sees his name in print. In his early twenties, Borges moves back to Argentina.

A part of Borges, however, never abandons the south of the Iberian Peninsula. In the earliest edition of his first anthology of poems, *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (*Fervor of Buenos Aires*) (1923), Borges includes a homage to tango entitled "Música Patria" ("Patriotic Music"). The poem's opening line reads "Moorish cries" (Cajero Vázquez 287).[3] This piece was eliminated from later editions of *Fervor of Buenos Aires*, but some of the poems that were included in later editions also evoke al-Andalus. In one of them, Borges mentions "Arabs" among his ancestors

[2] The Borgeses stayed in Majorca from March to December of 1919 (Woodall 35).
[3] "Quejumbres moras" (Cajero Vázquez 287).

(Cajero Vázquez 423).[4] In 1936 Borges publishes the often cited essay "Los traductores de las *1001 Noches*" ("The Translators of the *Thousand and One Nights*"). A footnote detects similarities between a poem cited in one of Scheherazade's tales, a poem authored by the thirteenth-century Andalusi poet Abu al-Baqa' al-Rundi (1204-1248), and the *Coplas por la muerte de su padre* (*Stanzas on the Death of His Father*) (c. 1476) by Jorge Manrique (1440-1479). A few years later, during his forties, Borges writes the stories that would catapult him to fame. "La busca de Averroes" ("Averroes's Search") (1947) is set in twelfth-century Iberia. The tales "El Zahir" ("The Zahir") (1945) and "El Aleph" ("The Aleph") (1947) center on magical objects that throughout the centuries acquire multiple forms in different global regions, including al-Andalus during the Middle Ages.

In several of his writings Borges alludes to three poetic genres with deep connections with al-Andalus: psalms, zajals and nature poetry. An allusion to psalms appears, for instance, in the tale "El milagro secreto" ("The Secret Miracle") (1943). The story is about Nazism, but mentions the last poet of the Hebrew Golden Age (10th-12th centuries), Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (c. 1089-1164). Ibn Ezra, a twelfth-century scholar and poet, is a central cultural icon in the history of Judaism. One of his best-known works is a eulogy that echoes biblical psalms. In addition, Borges mentions zajals, an Arabic poetic genre born in al-Andalus, in three different occasions: his poems "Cuarteta" ("Quatrain") (1946) and "Alhambra" (1976) and a short essay he writes in 1986 on the *Libro de Buen Amor* (*Book of Good Love*) (c. 1330). Finally, Borges incorporates stylistic patterns in the stories and poems that he sets in al-Andalus, like the chiaroscuro effect that is created by contrasting the starkness of the desert and the abundance of a

[4] The poem that mentions the Arab ancestors is titled "Líneas que pude haber escrito y perdido hacia 1922" ("Lines I Could Have Written and Lost by 1922") and is incorporated to *Fervor of Buenos Aires* in 1967 (Cajero Vázquez 423).

lush garden. This trope is associated with Arabic medieval poetry and with nature poetry, a genre that is reminiscent of the European pastoral and that was particularly popular in al-Andalus (Alvarez, "Spain" 731; Jayyusi 369; Scheindlin and Barletta 66). Borges refers to this form of Arabic-speaking "pastoral" in his tale "Averroes's Search."

Other references and allusions to Medieval Iberia can be found throughout Borges's writings. In fact, Medieval Iberia is conjured up at least once in the vast majority of the anthologies of essays, poems and stories included in the four volumes of his *Obras completas* (*Complete Works*). This should not come as a surprise considering that in his intellectual milieu, medievalisms were utilized to support all brands of political and philological theories and policies. What may come as a surprise is how little attention his references to Medieval Iberia have received; Borges is one of the most scrutinized writers of the twentieth century and his most commentated essays and tales conjure up distinctively Andalusi imagery, but this thematic aspect of his work has gone largely unnoticed.

Academic specializations are in part responsible for this scholarly lacuna. Experts in Arabic or Hebrew poetry who are qualified to detect and understand Borges's references to zajals and Ibn Ezra are not usually familiarized with the work of Latin American twentieth-century poets. Conversely, specialists in Borges are not necessarily acquainted with Arabic and Hebrew poems from al-Andalus. Even within Spanish departments, the traditional division between Latin Americanists and Iberianists does not foster transatlantic studies like this one. Related to this disciplinary barrier is the fact that many Latin Americanists are still wary of the implications of studies on transatlantic connections; they perceive that the tendency of Spain to adopt a tutelary role over its former colonies is still manifest among literary scholars (see, e.g., Gómez López-Quiñones, "Borges" 159; Altschul, *Geographies* 141).

Borges's Medieval Iberia has also remained largely unnoticed because most of his allusions are not to Castilian medieval classics but rather to Hebrew and Arabic poetic and architectural conventions, and the notion of an exclusively Latin and Christian Middle Ages is still ubiquitous among literary scholars and even among medievalists. This explains why studies on Borges's medievalisms completely overlook his writings about Andalusi Arabic and Hebrew poetic genres. In 2014, M. J. Toswell dedicated a whole volume to Borges's medievalism: *Borges the Unacknowledged Medievalist: Old English and Old Norse in His Life and Work.* Toswell's insights into the Iberian Middle Ages are limited to one short comment which states that Borges was "not impressed" with Spanish medieval literature (2003). One footnote includes dismissive remarks that Borges makes in an interview about the *Poema del Mio Cid* (*Poem of the Cid*) (c. 1220) and about the *Libro de Buen Amor* (*Book of Good Love*) (c. 1330). In the interview Borges criticizes the *Poem of the Cid* as "dull and unimaginative" and the Archpriest as not very important (Borges and Sorrentino 22). A few years earlier, in 2007, Andrés Lema-Hincapié had dedicated an article entitled "Borges y el medioevo literario de España" ("Borges and the Literature of Medieval Spain") to Borges's attitude toward the literature of the Spanish Middle Ages. Drawing from Borges's allusions to Spanish medieval classics in his interviews, essays and tales, Lema-Hincapié concludes that although Borges shows little interest for the *Poem of the Cid* and the *Book of Good Love*, he does dedicate considerable attention to Manrique's *Stanzas*. Both Toswell and Lema-Hincapié concentrate on works written in Spanish. Similarly, when Borges's commentators consider his intertextual dialogues with medieval writers from outside of Spain, they focus on classics from the Romance world. They examine Borges's Dantean allusions in "The Aleph" and "The Zahir," but fail to notice that both tales include numerous references to the Arabic- and Hebrew-speaking Medieval Iberia.

This approach to Borges's medievalisms ignores that ever since the sixteenth century the view of an exclusively Christian and Latin Middle Ages has coexisted with studies which argue for the dialogue of Arabic and Hebrew narratives and poetic conventions with Romance ones, especially in the case of languages born in Mediterranean countries like Spain, France and Italy. Medieval boundaries were porous, and the Pyrenees and the Mediterranean both functioned as contact zones. Medievalists and philologists generally accept that these contact zones were a breeding ground for material and cultural exchanges that need to be acknowledged in their studies—this notion, however, is still not reflected on studies of Borges's medievalisms.[5]

In addition, the acknowledgment that Latin American medievalisms exist and are worthy of critical examinations is a relatively recent development. The 2009 collection *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World: The Idea of "the Middle Ages" Outside Europe* includes three articles on Latin American medievalisms—a rarity in the scholarly world of medievalisms outside of Europe, where Anglo-American medievalism takes center stage. In the introduction, editors Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altschul explain that they include articles that are not concerned with Anglo-American medievalisms because many studies are "made about, or from Anglo-America" (6). By including articles on Latin America, South Africa and Japan, they are "able to place Anglo-American medievalism in a global context" (6). Latin American evocations of Medieval Iberia are also present in a 2012 anthology called *Contemporary Sephardic Identities in the Americas: An Interdisciplinary Approach*. Its editors, Margalit Bejarano and Edna Aizenberg, clarify that they published the anthology because, while works on Jews from the English-

[5] On the repositioning of the field of medieval studies due to the shortcomings of the identity of medieval Christian Europe see, e.g., Amer 367; Davis and Altschul 3, and Dodds 342-3. Abundant works focus on the influence of Arabic poetic conventions and scholarship on texts written in Romance languages. For recent examples see: Mallette; Wacks, *Framing*; Menocal, *The Arabic Role* and Metlitzki. In the Spanish-speaking world we find Castro, Asín and López-Baralt, *Huellas*, for example.

speaking world and Spain abound, little has been written about the Sephardic experience in Latin America (60).

The use of postcolonial approaches to illuminate non-European medievalisms is also of fairly recent vintage. Not until in the 2000s, for example, did scholars like Elizabeth Emery employ postcolonial theory to examine why strict art historians do not generally characterize certain cathedrals outside Europe as genuinely Gothic, even when these cathedrals employ a textbook Gothic style. These historians enforce a narrow definition of the term "Gothic," wherein the style only flourishes during the Middle Ages. Just as some fundamentalists view Western European Christianity as the most genuine form of the faith, these scholars define the Gothic as an exceptionally European product. In her article on the postcolonial Gothic (included in *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World*), Emery zooms in on the case of Gothic cathedrals of the United States. She demonstrates that many nineteenth- and twentieth-century politicians and intellectuals were interested in constructing buildings of this particular style partly because they saw it as a way to return the values of the United States to those of the Christian Middle Ages (249). Emery recognizes the denial to consider cathedrals built in the United States as Gothic, regardless of their adherence to Gothic requirements, as an instance of what Homi Bhabha identifies as "almost the same but not quite." Emery also observes how art historians from the United States stretch the definition of the Gothic so as to allow an "American Gothic."

Another cultural product that some academics interpret as exclusively medieval is the epic genre. Just as narrow definitions of the Gothic uphold that only buildings constructed during the Middle Ages can be considered Gothic, narrow definitions of the epic claim that poems of this genre could only be written during Antiquity or the Middle Ages. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many considered the epic to be the most prestigious of all literary genres,

and poems written during the Middle Ages which could be classified as epics were granted a particularly important role in modeling different European nations, languages and cultures. Some of these long poems became national epics. The narrow definition of the national epic implied that nations outside of Europe could aspire to have their own poetry, but that it could never be as prestigious as the poetry produced in Europe during the Middle Ages. Some influential scholars from the United States were eager to return their country to the values of a medieval Western and Christian Europe—an instinct that was shared by some influential Latin Americans. Just as Anglo-Americans stretched the definition of Gothic, Latin Americans stretched the definition of national epics. Only recently have scholars utilized a postcolonial approach to answer the question of how Latin Americans dealt with their perceived "lack" of a national epic poem. Altschul conducts the most comprehensive study on this topic. In her volume *Geographies of Philological Knowledge: Postcoloniality and the Transatlantic Epic* (2012), she shows that during the nineteenth century, at least part of the intellectual elite was extremely interested in imagining their Latin American nations as part of the West, and that one of the ways in which they attempt to create a similarity between them and other Western nations—Germany, France, England—was to find a poem written in their nation that could qualify as epic. Altschul sees their project as a manifestation of their internalization of coloniality.

Emery, Altschul and other scholars—including José Rabasa and Louise d'Arcens—also detect a problematic aspect of the use of medievalisms in the writing of the premodernity of postcolonial nations: the effacement of Amerindian populations from their history. By using elements of Europe's premodernity in order to write their own premodernity, in certain instances, historians, philologists and literary scholars from the United States, Latin America or Australia are choosing to overlook, ignore and even erase their indigenous past. Therefore, when

examining medievalisms from outside of Europe we should not lose sight of the fact that they are frequently connected with two colonial enterprises: that of Europeans over Americans and that of Americans of European descent over Native Americans.

Another theoretical breakthrough that has taken place in the past decade is exemplified by what Karla Mallette calls "New Philology." She proposes this type of philology in her volume *European Modernity and the Arab Mediterranean: Toward a New Philology and a Counter-Orientalism*, published in 2010. The term "New Philology" has acquired a motley array of meanings throughout the years. The philology proposed by Mallette is "New" and different than traditional forms of philology in that it challenges the following three of its more rooted assumptions. First, instead of reinforcing the boundaries between nations, New Philology exposes their porousness. Second, instead of building walls between Semitic and Romance languages and poetry, New Philology shows how Semitic and Romance traditions are intertwined.[6] Finally, instead of relying on the traditional and simplistic model of "influence," New Philology explores alternative metaphors to better illustrate the often-unexpected way in which texts and poets dialogue with each other across time and space. For instance, Mallette notes a nineteenth-century scholar's comment that the "spirit" of a thirteenth-century Muslim poet from Cairo "reappeared" a century later in Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374), thus insinuating "a new way of representing influence: *metempsychosis*—the incorporeal migration of ideas from one human mind to another" (36). This approach does not fit the positivistic standards of

[6] Mallette is especially concerned with the contact between the Arabic and Romance worlds outside of the territory of Spain. In this, she is part of a philological tendency that exists since the sixteenth century, which highlights these contacts in, among other places, the territories of the nations we now call Italy, France and England.

conventional philology but, as Mallette shows, it can still serve as a fruitful model to explore connections between the Arabic and Romance worlds.[7]

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Borges's Medieval Iberia is an examination of these interlocked issues of identity, colonialism, language and the geographical spread of cultures. It is comprised of five chapters, including an introductory chapter that familiarizes the reader both with Borges's approach to the Iberian Middle Ages and with the scholarly and popular myths about this particular period. The other chapters are distributed in two parts, each of which is composed of two chapters. The first part describes how Borges endorses what in the field of philology is known as the "Arabic thesis"—the proposition that the poetry of the Arabic-speaking world influenced early Romance poetics and languages. The second part shifts the focus from the territory of Europe to Argentina and illustrates how his subject position as a writer of European descent who lives most of his life in his native Argentina colors his gaze on the Middle Ages.

The introductory chapter, "A Polychromatic Language and History," argues that Borges challenges deeply entrenched beliefs about the most significant events of the Iberian Middle Ages: the 711 CE conquest of the peninsula by Arabic-speaking Muslims, the 1391 Toledo pogrom, the defeat of the last Muslim ruler in 1492 and the expulsion of Jews. One of the ways in which Borges counters exclusionary forms of medievalisms is by constantly bringing to the fore two Semitic poetic genres which were widely used in al-Andalus: nature poetry and psalms. The chapter examines the significance of the mention of the Andalusi poet Ibn Ezra in "The Secret Miracle." It also describes how Borges deploys several strategies to counter exclusionary

[7] I have decided not to use the term "mudejar" which is now generally used to designate Andalusi hybrid cultural forms, in which Romance languages embrace Arabic ones. On the limitations of this term see Harvey 3-5 and Dodds 335-6.

narratives. He calls attention to architectural features usually associated with the world of Islam, and explicitly endorses neo-Sephardism. He praises medieval Jewish writers who lived in the Iberian Peninsula, and continuously reminds us that the Spanish language was exposed to the languages we now associate with Islam and Judaism from its very inception. Borges thus draws a multicultural or—borrowing from a poem written by Grünberg— "polychromatic" Castilian language.[8]

Part 1, "A Borgesian New Philology," opens with Chapter 2, "Spain of Islam, of the Kabbalah," which examines how Borges brings to our attention the influence of Arabic culture on Castilian medieval classics and on the *Quixote*. It contextualizes the allusion to zajals included in his essay on the *Book of Good Love* in the philological debates of the time. The chapter also expounds on how Borges's comments on the *Quixote* counter anti-Semitic readings of the classic which were in vogue at the time he writes. Chapter 3, "How 'Western' was the Rest of Medieval Europe?" examines Borges's original answer to the question of how Arabic poetry and tales also influenced medieval and early modern classics from Italy and England. It reads the Andalusi allusions included in "The Aleph" and "The Zahir" as a reflection on the influence that the Andalusi Arabic- and Hebrew- speaking worlds might have had on Dante. The chapter argues that Borges does not suggest a straightforward influence. Rather, the tales remind us of what Mallette identifies as metempsychosis, where the incorporeal migration of ideas—this time, about the afterlife—travels from poet to poet, including poets who lived in different parts of the world across the centuries.

[8] Grünberg asks: "Don't you see why a troubadour would extirpate / the fineries from his polychromatic language?" ["¿Ni comprendéis que un trovador extirpe / las galas de su lengua policroma?"] (Grünberg, "Junto a un Río de Babel" 275).

The tales of the *Thousand and One Nights* are prominent in Part 1, which highlights the philological implications of the parallel Borges draws between the *Nights*, Abu al-Baqa' al-Rundi, and Manrique's *Stanzas*.[9] Part 1 also examines how, according to Borges, Scheherazade's tales belong to the same family as those included in the Spanish medieval classic *Libro de los enxiemplos del Conde Lucanor et de Patronio* (*Book of the Examples of Count Lucanor and of Patronio*, hereinafter *Count Lucanor*) (1335); in addition, a story of the famed anthology, Borges reminds us, inspired an episode of the *Canterbury Tales* (c. 1380).

While the first three chapters focus mostly on Europe, the last two turn our attention to Argentina. Part 2, "Argentine Medievalisms," offers a critical contextualization of Borges's medievalisms within the Spanish-speaking world of his time. Chapter 4, "Epic Tango," examines Borges's proposal that tango lyrics could in time be combined to form an Argentine epic poem. The chapter argues that while traditional Latin American approaches to the epic genre reflect an internalization of coloniality, Borges attempted, with varying degrees of success, to expose and overcome this coloniality. Medieval Iberia is included in an analysis of "Patriotic Music" and of the *Poem of the Cid*; however, the bulk of the chapter is concerned with how, in Borges's works, different "premodern" traditions dialogue and compete with that of Medieval Iberia. Al-Andalus is placed alongside other premodern traditions, including that of Scandinavian medieval poetry and even the traditions of Afro-Argentines and of Argentine Amerindians. The chapter argues for certain limitations and shortcomings in Borges's view, which are primarily related to traces of a paternalistic form of racism against both Amerindians and Afro-Argentines.

The fifth and last chapter, "Averroes in Midcolonial Argentina," consists of a close reading of one of Borges's most commentated tales, "Averroes's Search." The story is a

[9] I use the terms *Thousand and One Nights* and *Nights* indistinctively as in Mallette 223, and Kennedy and Warner 3, for example.

fictionalization of the scholarly discussions and conflicts created by the similarities and differences between Andalusi and Arab Arabic. The chapter reveals how Borges makes certain to draw parallels between this discussion, apparently unconnected to the world of Argentina, to discussions on the differences and similarities between Argentine and Castilian Spanish. The chapter argues that Borges's tale challenges the then-extremely influential notion that the Spanish spoken in Castile was the only correct version, and that the nuances and idiosyncrasies of the Spanish spoken elsewhere were always doomed to fall short of this Castilian ideal.

Borges's Medieval Iberia ends with a discussion about how Part 1's findings about philology are articulated with Part 2's analysis about the use of medievalisms for postcolonial purposes. This analysis weaves together the various theoretical strands and offers a summary and critique of the findings.

Chapter 1: A Polychromatic Spanish Language and History

In a 1966 lecture Borges observes that medieval Norse gods still survive in the words "Thursday" and "Friday." Thursday is the day of the god of thunder and strength Thor while Friday is the day of the Goddess of beauty Frig (*Professor* 2). When we use the word "Saturday," instead, we are evoking a Latin God, Saturn.[10] These examples show, according to Borges, how both Germanic and Latin cultures are inscribed in the English language. Like English, the Spanish language is also informed by different traditions. Defining specifically which cultures are part of the Spanish language has been for a long time, and continues to be to this day, the object of ideologically charged debates which touch upon such sensitive topic as the relationship between national identity and religion. This chapter provides an introduction to the way in which Borges intervenes in these debates.

Spanish was born as a Latin dialect and there is no doubt that Latin culture played a crucial role in its development. Just like the English word for Saturday, the Spanish one, *sábado*, pays homage to Saturn. In the case of Spanish, however, the Thursday and Friday gods are also of Latin origin: *jueves* is the day of the god of thunder Jove, and *viernes* is dedicated to the Goddess of beauty Venus. Although the Latin tradition carried with it gods like Saturn, Jove and Venus, at one point the language became intricately related to Christianity. This determined that some found it justifiable to assign a Catholic faith to Latin and, by extension, to Spanish. This tendency harkens back to at least the fifteenth century, when Castilian was simply "rechristened 'Old Christian,' or just plain *Cristiano*" (Menocal, *The Ornament* 3519). The adscription of a

[10] Borges taught English Literature from 1956 to 1964 at the *Universidad de Buenos Aires* (University of Buenos Aires) and then from 1970 to 1974 at the *Universidad Católica Argentina* (Catholic University of Argentina) (Penna 97).

Catholic faith to the Spanish language is also revealed in the first study ever dedicated to tracing the origins of the language. Authored by the Cordovan erudite Bernardo de Alderete (1565-1645), *Del origen y principio de la lengua castellana* (*On the Origin and Beginning of the Castilian Language*) was published in Rome in 1606. The semiotician Walter Mignolo argues that the publication in this symbolic city underscored the proximity of Roman Catholicism to the Spanish language (*The Darker Side of the Renaissance* 31). According to Mignolo, Alderete

> recognized religion as the most important ally for maintaining or changing a language. Consequently, since Latin was the language linked to Christianity, Alderete perceived that the corruption of Latin by the Visigoths did not alter the more profound connection between Latin and Christianity, which was transferred to modern Vernacular languages and resulted in a clear distinction from Hebrew, which was linked to Latin through the Bible, and Arabic, the language of the Moors, the Koran and the "other." (*The Darker Side of the Renaissance* 30-1)

The Spanish language Alderete constructs is, at its very heart, Catholic.[11]

The assignment of a Catholic faith to the Castilian language became especially significant during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when Romantic poets and scholars looked at the Middle Ages in search of the supposed spiritual origins of their respective nations. They found the true spirit of the Volk in popular ballads, the heroic origins of their nations in epics, and the first exemplars of European poetry in troubadour's lyrics.

In 1760 the Scottish poet James Macpherson (1736-1796), an early representative of the Romantic paradigm, published the slender and highly influential volume *Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland, translated from the Gaelic or Erse Language by James Macpherson*. Five years later, in 1765, Thomas Percy (1729-1811) published a collection of popular ballads and called it *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*; in 1778-79 Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) published the *Völkslieder* and in 1802 Walter Scott (1771-1832)

[11] For a detailed account of conservative views see: Pike.

published ballads attributed to his native Scotland in *Minstrels of the Scottish Border*. In Spain, academics turn their attention to the *Romancero*, to which is traditionally ascribed a popular and oral origin, just like the ballads (see, e.g., Rico 234). To this day, the *Romancero* is considered to be intricately linked to the Spanish character. The 2015 *Encyclopædia Britannica* characterizes the ballads of the *Romancero* as a "sourcebook of national history and national character of Spaniards of all classes" and deems that "they lie at the heart of the national consciousness" ("Romancero"). The Romantic paradigm also pays close attention to the lyric songs of the *troubadours* from Provence, the *trouvères* from northern France, the *Minnesang* from Germany and the tradition of *trovadorismo* from Galicia and Portugal. Romanticism celebrates these medieval bards as the first national poets. But the genre to which Romanticism attributes more prestige is that of the epic. In Spain, this determined that during the nineteenth century the *Poem of the Cid* was placed "at the highest generic position, that of the epic, and because of its national character the poem becomes the 'national epic' of Spain" (Altschul, *Geographies* 44).

Romantic medievalists see themselves as unearthing the mythical origins of their respective nations. They therefore pay special consideration to poems and songs produced in early versions of each of their (national) languages, generated in the original (national) territories of each of these languages. It is thus the Romantic paradigm which defines Spanish medieval literature as distinctively Castilian, and which selects which works deserve a place in the canon. The *Romancero* and the *Poem of the Cid* are logically assigned a prominent spot. Other works that also made it into the canon are the *Book of Good Love* by Juan Ruiz (1283-1350), *Count Lucanor* by Don Juan Manuel (1282-1348) and the *Stanzas on the Death of His Father* by Manrique. Scholars thus relegate to a second status writings produced in Arabic, Hebrew and even Latin. This Castilian-centered model has determined that, as Altschul observes, the *Poem of*

the Cid was chosen as Spain's foundational text, even though there are earlier works which also recount the heroic life of the Cid ("Andrés Bello" 222). The problem with these works is their language: they were written in Latin (or Arabic) instead of Spanish.

The Romantic paradigm also plays a substantial role in forging the basic plot of Spanish medieval history. According to the most conservative Romantic approach, Spain is "lost" to the Arabs (i.e. Islam) in 711 CE, only to be bravely recovered in 1492 by the Catholic Kings after an extensive, heroic and arduous "Reconquest" process. 1492 also witnesses the expulsion of the Jews, an event that a fundamentalist version of Romanticism explains as a necessary step in the forging of the exclusively Catholic nation that was Spain. In the view of the most conservative and anti-Semitic views, Jews being cruel, venal and greedy justifies the pogroms to which they were subjected, their expulsion and the Inquisition. It is this sort of logic that determines the anti-Jewish connotations and denotations of words such as "inquisition" and "venal." These are just a few examples of how the view of a fundamentalist and exclusively Catholic language is accompanied by the view of a fundamentalist and exclusively Catholic nation.

By contrast, other narratives—endorsed by Borges—emphasize the value of medieval Arabic and Hebraic cultures. By doing so, they defy the integrity of an inquisitorial Spanish identity that would be eternally committed to the Faith. The scholar who went down in history as the champion of multiculturalism is Américo Castro (1885-1972). His magnum opus *España en su historia* (*The Structure of Spanish History*) (1948, revised as *La realidad histórica de España* [*The Historical Reality of Spain*] in 1954, 1962 and 1966) was first published in Buenos Aires in 1948 and it forever shattered the notion of a purely Latin and Christian Spain. Other multicultural highbrows include the also Spanish intellectuals José Antonio Conde (1766-1820), Miguel Asín Palacios (1871-1944) (hereinafter, Asín) and Rafael Cansinos-Asséns (1882-1964).

Conde authored a voluminous work on medieval history which circulated widely when it was first published in Spain in 1820, and which was soon translated into German (1824-25), French (1825) and English (1854). Beyond its inaccuracies, what stands out in Conde's oeuvre is its determination to tell the story from the Arab side. This effort is even evident in the title of his volume: *Historia de la dominación de los árabes en España sacada de varios manuscritos y memorias arábigas* (*History of the Arab Dominion in Spain taken from Several Arab Manuscripts and Memoirs*) (1820-1821). Asín was one of Conde's disciples, and is mostly known for highlighting the influence of Arabic poetry and scholarship in Spanish and Italian classics. Cansinos-Asséns, a contemporary of Asín, dedicated his life to contest the prejudice that holds that being Jewish is incompatible with being Spanish. Borges was familiarized with all their works, and was especially influenced by Cansinos-Asséns. Borges met Cansinos-Asséns in his twenties, and even in his sixties, he would describe himself as a "disciple" of Cansinos-Asséns ("An Autobiographical Essay" 151).

Thanks to the works of Castro, Conde, Cansinos-Asséns and many others nowadays the most nationalistic and racist aspects of conservatism have been mostly restrained. In the past forty years the Romantic Castilian-centered model has been under attack. It is now acknowledged, for instance, that in certain areas of Spain many do not consider that they belong to the same nation, and that this feeling can sometimes be traced to the Middle Ages. Nonetheless, one could argue that the approach that so far has dominated the study of Borges's Iberian Middle Ages reveals the extent to which notions inherited from traditional forms of Romanticism still inform the discipline. There is surprisingly little written about Borges's al-Andalus. As mentioned in the Introduction, even specialists as Lema-Hincapié and Toswell who address the issue of Borges's Medieval Iberia coincide in focusing their studies on canonical

works written in Castilian. This chapter's focus, instead, is placed on Borges's consistent allusions to two different Semitic poetic traditions: nature poetry and psalms.[12] These two genres were widespread in polyglossic al-Andalus. Although some psalms were penned in Hebrew, most of the poems that can be classified under these genres are written in Arabic. Borges only had a very basic knowledge of both languages, and he only accesses nature poems and psalms through translations. Still, the chapter will show that this was no impediment for him to showcase these distinctively Semitic poetic forms. By highlighting these Semitic poetic forms, Borges exposes the fact that the ties to Catholic Rome were not the only ones defining the culture of medieval Iberia and, by extension, of the Spanish language.

This chapter likewise argues that Borges's deployment of these genres is accompanied by his challenging of the Romantic historiography and mythology that was crafted around the most significant events of the Iberian Middle Ages. Specifically, Borges defies Romantic accounts of the following watershed moments: first, the 711 CE invasion of the Peninsula by a North African army; second, the 1391 Toledo pogrom; third, the defeat of the last Muslim ruler at the hands of the Catholic Kings in 1492 and, finally, the expulsion of Iberian Jews ordered during that same momentous year. Instead of portraying the conquest of 711 CE as a loss and the one of 1492 as a victory, Borges's work invites readers to position themselves in the place of conquering Islam or of the last Muslim king. In a similar vein, instead of justifying the cruelty of the pogroms or the expulsion, Borges's poems encourage his readers to adopt the perspective of Iberian Jews.

[12] In *Borges and the Politics of Form* (1998) González shows that form is key to Borges's philosophy. As González, I avoid any facile interpretation which would attribute fixed meanings to specific genres. Rather, I consider their historical and traditional meaning and also Borges's personal analysis of them (4-5). In the particular cases of the genres of nature poetry and of psalms, their meaning and significance is intricately linked to their medieval character, and especially to the considerable role which the Romantic paradigm assigns to this particular era in the forging of both nations and languages.

Islamicate Nature Poetry

During the Middle Ages, poems featuring flowers, gardens, lovely scenery and the spring season were so abundant and characteristic that they came to represent a distinct genre in the East and particularly in al-Andalus "where it was officially encouraged and frequently attempted" (Jayyusi 369). In her 2002 article on nature poetry, Salma Khadra Jayyusi explains that al-Andalus became the fortunate stage of "a widening of poetic diction, an exercise of the imagination to focus on verbal refinements, to cull rare epithets and find ever new ways of describing the same thing: a rose, a narcissus, a violet, a bower, a garden, a stream" (374). Jayyusi—as most Arabists nowadays—groups this type of poems under the label "nature poetry" and prefers to distinguish this genre from the pastoral one that developed in Romance languages.

Abd al-Rahman's "The Palm Tree" (770 CE) is a well-known exemplar of nature poetry.[13] Borges quotes a couplet from this poem in his tale "Averroes's Search": "Thou too art, oh palm! / On this foreign soil…" ("The Aleph" 240).[14] This and other Arabic-Andalusi poems are included in Conde's *History of the Arab Dominion in Spain*, a book that Borges mentions in a 1932 essay.[15] One of the poems translated by Conde assimilates the fleeting nature of human beauty to that of a flower (540); another one expresses admiration for a flowery garden (185), yet another one for the trees of a garden (248). Other poems feature roses and jasmines (216, 276-7, 288). In these particular poems flora takes center stage. Other nature poems choose water as their focal point. One such poem is carved into the walls of the Alhambra. The lyrical piece likens the fountain of the Courtyard of the Lions to a pearl bowl, and the water running through it to molten

[13] Like other Arabic poems of the time, the one by Abd al-Rahman is not titled. I am entitling the poem only for the sake of clarity.
[14] "Tu también eres, ¡oh palma! / En este suelo extranjera" ("El Aleph" 587). For another translation of "The Palm Tree" see: Menocal 825.
[15] The essay is "El arte narrativo y la magia" ("Narrative Art and Magic") (Borges, *The Total Library* 80; Borges, "Discusión" 231).

silver flowing through pearls (Vidal Castro 104). The silver metaphor is also present in a poem included in Conde's volume, which describes "silver waterfalls / That descend whispering from the highest cliffs" (208).[16] In another poem, the poet-king from Seville al-Mutamid (1040-1095) compares water to a saber and imagines that if water flowing from a pump would freeze, it would become a cutlass (Vidal Castro 103).

The allusions to water in Andalusi nature poetry frame it within the larger tradition of Arabic poetry, in which, to this day, water is a potent image of fertility, potential and even revolution (Allen 209). The tension between the "dualities of aridity and moisture, of death and birth," are a constant in the poetry of the Arabic speaking world (Allen 201). Even pre-Islamic poets reflect this tension in their pieces, and the text of the Koran itself shows "an obvious concern with the rigours of daily life in the way it depicts Paradise as well-watered garden" (Allen 201-16). The Koran includes several descriptions of copious vegetation and fauna which are "incorporated into paraenetic appeals to recognize divine providence…since all these benefits are signs…bearing a coded message" (Neuwirth 2869). Just like these Arabic and Andalusi writings, Borges also features flora and water in his Andalusi-themed pieces.

"La cámara de las estatuas" ("The Chamber of Statues") (1933) tells about the beginning of the Muslim rule in the Peninsula and the poem "Alhambra" (1976) discusses its end. "The Chamber of Statues" concludes by drawing a lively image of the "fig trees and watered plains" of Andalusia, a place in which, we are told, "no man suffers thirst" ("A Universal History" 56).[17] This contrast between desert thirst and an oasis also shows up in the opening couplet of

[16] "cascadas de plata / Que descienden susurrando desde las peñas más altas" (Conde 208).
[17] "higueras y praderas regadas…no se sufre la sed" (Borges, "Historia universal" 339).

"Alhambra": "Pleasant the voice of the water / to those wearied by black sand" ("Alhambra").[18] "Alhambra" also conjures up jasmines, lemon trees and "delicate labyrinths" of water.[19]

The stylistic use of nature imagery in the "The Chamber of Statues" and "Alhambra" appears in most of the pieces Borges sets in al-Andalus, revealing his familiarity with Arabic-Andalusi nature poetry. The poem "Ronda" (1981) offers a series of snapshots that together compose the poet's vision of the Andalusian city of Ronda. The set includes Islam, algebra, patios and, what matters for our purposes here, jasmines, roses, and water. All these vibrant elements are contrasted to the desert in the last two verses: "And a faint sound of water, which conjured up / memories of deserts" ("La cifra" 319).[20] Likewise, the poem "De la diversa Andalusia" ("On the Diverse Andalusia") (1986) evokes "[t]he cadence of the water of Islam in the grove" ("Los conjurados" 531).[21] The short essay "Fuentes" ("Fountains") (1984) affirms that in Hagrite nations fountains "come from an ancient nostalgia for deserts, whose poets sang, as is known, to a cistern or an oasis" ("Atlas" 473).[22] This laconic piece includes only one instance of nature poetry; "Averroes's Search" is much more evocative.

The difference between nature and art, between what is given and what is made, is at the core of this intriguing tale. Arabic-Andalusi nature poetry becomes the subject's perfect channel. The tale opens with a subtle evocation of nature poetry: a scene of "Averroes" (Borges's Averroes) expressing how glad he is to hear fountain water, attributing his gratefulness to the fact that his ancestors are from the desert, and contrasting the desert to Andalusi gardens. Later on in the tale, Muslim intellectuals debate on nature poetry, specifically poetry that features

[18] "Grata la voz del agua / a quien abrumaron negras arenas" (Borges, "Historia de la noche" 185).
[19] "finos laberintos" (Borges, "Historia de la noche" 185).
[20] "y un tenue rumor de agua, que conjuraba / memorias del desiertos" (Borges, "La cifra" 319).
[21] "[l]a cadencia del agua del Islam en la alameda" (Borges, "Los conjurados" 531).
[22] "proceden de una antigua nostalgia de los desiertos, cuyos poetas cantaban, según se sabe, a una cisterna o a un oasis" (Borges, "Atlas" 473).

water, flowers and palms. One of the characters rants at those supposedly outdated Andalusi poets who still celebrate a well of water. According to him, this makes sense in the desert, but it becomes absurd in the banks of the Guadalquivir. That is, it is ridiculous to celebrate a small pond of water when they are close to, precisely, the "Big Wadi" which today, "in lightly touched up Arabic," is the Guadalquivir or Wadi al-Kabir (Menocal, *The Ornament* 199). "Averroes" takes on a different point of view. He argues that this kind of "desert" nature poetry could still be effective in al-Andalus. He cites two poems: the one about the palm quoted above and one in which a blind camel functions as a metaphor for destiny. Destiny, as a blind camel, is strong and cruel. The debate evinces Borges's awareness of the preeminence of nature poetry in al-Andalus.

The dialogue also highlights the porous nature of the boundary separating the Koran from Arabic poetry. "Averroes" claims that writing is an art, and that it therefore does not belong to the realm of nature. He goes on to explain that while flowers, fruits and birds are part of nature, poetry is not. The tale offers two alternative readings of "Averroes'"s argument. "Averroes" himself advances an argument. He thinks that he is only asserting that the Koran is a Platonic archetype. But "Averroes"'s reasoning could also be read as highlighting that *all* writing, even the one of the Koran, is art; unlike nature, it is an artifice: by definition, a human, not Divine, creation. His reckoning could thus be interpreted as viewing scripture as literature, and as challenging the divine authorship of the Koran. This is quickly noted by one of the guests in the party who is outraged at the mere thought of writing being an art, precisely because the original of the Koran is the "mother of the Book." He adamantly asserts that the Koran existed before the Creation and it is kept in heaven. Another guest endorses him by expounding on the Orthodox doctrine: the Koran is one of God's attributes, as is his Piety. This brief account of the debate illustrates that the conversation is simultaneously literary and theological, as the Arabic language

in which poets sing is also central to the makeup of the Koran.[23] But the conversation also confirms that Borges associates nature poetry to al-Andalus and medieval Islam.

Besides echoing nature poetry, another distinct Borgesian pattern, which has also been overlooked, and which is essential to comprehending his outlook on al-Andalus, involves his inclusion of explicit allusions to Islam in the stories and poems in which Andalusi nature is featured. All of the above-referenced pieces which highlight nature also refer explicitly to Islam. "On the Diverse Andalusia" directly connects nature to Islam by saying "water of Islam," "Ronda" opens with the word "Islam," and "Alhambra" concludes with the symbol of the Islamic moon being replaced by that of the Cross. Even when Islam is not mentioned explicitly, it is still included in not-so-subtle ways. The strict Muslim approach to monotheism is evoked with the dismissive mentioning of "idols" in "Chamber of Statues" and in "Ronda." It also comes up in "Averroes's Search." In the story, two different characters utter the classical "there is no god but God"—this being the more transparent declaration on Islam's unbending monotheism. This statement, which is repeatedly carved into the walls of the Alhambra, is also subtly alluded to in the poem "Alhambra," which refers to a God that is alone. This lonesome God is also conjured up in the poem "Ronda." Borges evidently thinks of a certain type of nature imagery (water, jasmines, roses) as well suited to address Islamic-Andalusi themes.

It is doubtful, though, that Borges would think of Arabic poetry as part of Islam as a religion. It would be more accurate to maintain that Borges sees Andalusi nature poetry as "Islamicate." "Islamicate" is a neologism coined by Marshal Hodgson in his groundbreaking multi-volume work *The Venture of Islam* (1975). Hodgson wrote that Islamicate "would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated

[23] On the Arabic language and the Koran see, e.g., McAuliffe 379.

with Islam and the Muslims" (1450). And poetry written in Arabic in a place under Muslim rule like al-Andalus definitively qualifies as being part of this social and cultural complex. Andalusi nature poetry is a distinctly Islamicate form, and the inclusion of roses, jasmines, lemon trees, groves, palms, deserts, fountains, rivers and streams in Borges's Andalusi-themed poetry echoes and pays homage to the Islamicate genre of nature poetry.

On the "Loss" and "Reconquest" of Spain

As advanced above, Borges's featuring of Andalusi nature poetry is part of his effort to tell the story from the other side: from the side that wins in 711 CE and loses in 1492. "The Chamber of Statues" and "Alhambra" echo an Islamicate form in order to highlight that an Islamicate perspective on the "loss" and "Reconquest" of Spain also existed. This point of view becomes especially significant when it is considered against a conservative backdrop. The myths which essentialist accounts craft around these two events are still widely spread, and they are characterized for telling the story from the opposite point of view, that is, from that of an exclusionary and parochial version of the Christian north.

The story that most Spanish speakers have in mind when they think of the events of 711 CE features the deserter Julian who betrays the Christian Visigoths by helping the Muslims in order to avenge the rape of his daughter. An early version of the myth appears in Alfonso X's *Estoria de España* (*History of Spain*) (c. 1271), which famously labels Julian as a "traitor" whose name "will always be cursed among anyone who speaks of him" (Alfonso X 130).[24] The details of the myth vary, but in their best-known versions, the main protagonists are always Visigoths: Count Julian, the rapist, and Count Julian's daughter. When Muslim characters make an appearance, it is only to showcase their supposedly treacherous nature. The stereotype of the

[24] "traydor / siempre será maldito de quantos dél fablaren" (Alfonso X 130).

untrustworthy Muslim made recently emerged in the 2002 best-selling novel *Yo, Isabel la Católica* (*I, Isabella the Catholic*). Authored by the prolific ultra-conservative writer César Vidal, the novel is an apologia and hagiography of the Queen who defeated the last Muslim ruler in the peninsula and expelled Jews. According to Vidal's Isabella, Muslims conquered the peninsula through deceit and treachery (155).[25] More importantly, Vidal's Isabella depicts the 711 CE invasion as a tragedy or disaster which the myth attempts to explain. She laments: "For the next eight centuries, the Muslim threat over us has not ceased. They burned our churches, raped our women, enslaved our children, murdered our elders" (153). [26] Vidal's Isabella's view of the supposed loss of Spain is just one example of how even today traditional accounts of the 711 CE conquest still hold their power grip. In her 2009 article on the topic, Denise K. Filios reflects:

> in…Latin and Castilian chronicles written between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, the guilty party is overwhelmingly identified as Julián. This tradition continues to the present, as in the work of Pedro Chalmeta…Although Juan Goytisolo tried to recuperate the Julián figure, the cumulative force of its construction has made it, I would suggest, irrecuperable as a symbol of the Muslim presence in Spain. Goytisolo presents the count Don Julián as the emblem of the African-Muslim influence on Spanish culture, parodying Francoist attempts to erase Arab traces from a purified Spain; however, he replicates the fascist targeting of the most vulnerable members of society—women and children—… (388).

Filios proposes to, instead, "undercut nationalist uses of the Julián figure." Borges's strategy in "The Chamber of Statues" is to avoid the figure of Julian altogether, and instead offer his readers a story from the perspective of the Berbers under the leadership of Syrian Arabs who were ultimately victorious.

[25] In her 2016 article on Vidal, Nicola Gilmour observes that in Vidal's novel Isabella's memory of 711 CE is "alarmingly fresh" for someone who is living 800 years later (265).
[26] "Durante los ocho siglos siguientes, no dejamos de padecer la amenaza de los musulmanes sobre nosotros. Quemaban nuestras iglesias, violaban nuestras mujeres, esclavizaban a nuestros hijos, asesinaban a nuestros ancianos" (Vidal Manzanares 153).

Similarly, in Spain, and in some parts of the Spanish-speaking world, the image that comes to mind when the capitulation of Granada is pictured is that of a sad and defeated Boabdil (Muhammad XII) (c. 1460-c. 1533) leaving his beloved Alhambra behind. In her volume *The Ornament of the World* (2002) María Rosa Menocal summarizes the typical iconography: "The little anecdote recounted over the years finds Boabdil sighing with regret on his way out of Granada, only to be chastised by his mother, who observes tartly that he should not cry like a woman for a place he could not defend like a man" (3445). This account implies that, had the coward Muhammad XII fought bravely, he would have had a chance—which was simply not the case. The adversary's femininity and fearfulness only highlights the virility and bravery of the Catholic army from the North.

In addition, conservative narratives insist on either overlooking the material traces of the Muslim presence in the Peninsula (its character as an Islamicate culture), or in relegating them to an irremediably lost past. In the architectural realm, this is reflected in their concentration in Romanic Cathedrals and (Castilian) Castles instead of highlighting the Islamicate aspects of the architecture that surrounds them. The recent disputes on the naming of a Cordovan world-renowned site affords us with an illustrative example of the reading of architecture as a contested site for the construction of memories. Most call it Mosque-Cathedral. However, in their respective websites, the Catholic Church calls it simply "Cathedral" and the Andalusian local government refers to it as a "Mosque." The dispute over the name acquired public and legal relevance in the 2000s. In 2006, "the diocese of Cordoba registered the world-renowned site to its name for €30. Andalusia's minister for tourism…complained: 'Hiding [the cathedral's] past as a mosque is like calling the Alhambra the palace of Charles V'" (Kassam). "In 2013, a group calling itself the Platform for the Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba: Everyone's Heritage, began a

campaign to wrest the site from the Catholic church's control and into the hands of public management" (Kassam). By 2014, the Platform's online petition had already gathered 350,000 signatures (Kassam). Yet, in November of 2014, the Church managed to have the name "Mosque-Cathedral" replaced by "Cathedral" in Google Maps. The change only lasted two days and was changed back to "Mosque-Cathedral" when the Platform urged Google "to avoid being an 'accomplice to this strategy of appropriation by the Córdoba diocese'" (Kassam). A complaint was filed and in June 2015 a Cordoba judge decided that the registration of the site under the name of the Church was legal.

The name chosen by these different interest groups reflects which particular era of history they think of as defining the site's idiosyncrasies and values. One of these periods is deemed to be Islamic hence vindicating the name "Mosque." The other period is considered to be Catholic, thus supporting the "Cathedral" designation. The government's official website concentrates on the material signs left by the additions made between the eighth and eleventh centuries: the columns. In the section "Architecture" of the website, the single phrase dedicated to the "Mosque" reads: "The Cordoba Mosque, result of a series of additions and alterations made between the eighth and eleventh centuries, has its highlight in the forest of columns and double arches on which its roof is supported" (Junta de Andalucía).[27] In his story "The Aleph" Borges calls it "aljama" and also emphasizes its many columns ("El Aleph" 589). By concentrating on the columns and naming it with the word of Arabic origin "aljama," Borges supports the view that the Islamicate columns define the character of the building. The Catholic Church, instead, concentrates on the period that starts in the thirteenth century. On June 2015, the prominent

[27] "La Mezquita cordobesa, producto de sucesivas ampliaciones y reformas entre los siglos VIII y XI, tiene su elemento más destacado en el bosque de columnas y dobles arquerías sobre las que se sustenta la cubierta" (Junta de Andalucía).

image that headed the "Official Web Site of the Holy Cathedral of Cordoba" stated: "Cathedral of Cordoba / 1239-2014 / 775 Years Together."[28] The font of the number 775 was considerably larger than the rest of the writing. The sub-text is clear: the relevant period of the building starts in 1239, when Fernand III donated it to the Catholic Church. This era, counting from 1239, has already lasted for more than 700 years. A press release dated June 9, 2015, published in the website, confirms this reading. It celebrates the legal decision to allow them to register the name of the "Cathedral." The verdict, according to them "ratifies that the holder of the temple is the Church, and that this has been the case for already nearly eight centuries since King Fernand III's donation in the year 1236" (Santa Iglesia Catedral de Córdoba, "Comunicado").[29]

Image that headed the "Official Website of the Holy Cathedral of Cordoba" on June 6, 2015.

Today we tend to think of conservative notions based on medieval historiographical disputes as outdated and left out by a secularized world-view. The thesis of *convivencia* (living together) propounded by Castro has debunked, to a great extent, the narrative that naturalizes Spain as a nation whose essence determines that it will always uphold a fundamentalist version

[28] "Web oficial de la Santa Iglesia Catedral de Córdoba" "Catedral de Córdoba / 1239-2014 / 775 años juntos" ("Santa Iglesia Catedral de Córdoba").
[29] "corrobora que el titular del templo es la Iglesia desde hace ya casi 8 siglos mediante donación del Rey Fernando III en el año 1236" (Santa Iglesia Catedral de Córdoba, "Comunicado").

of Catholicism. Yet, the authority of the Catholic Church to administer a public space, a world-renowned site, its official website and, arguably, its official name, is still very tangible. Images of a treacherous Count Julian and of a coward Boabdil are still popular, and the terms "loss" and "Reconquest" are still ubiquitous. Even the notion of Jewishness being incompatible with Spanishness is quite widespread (Goytisolo, "La historiografía" 34). But these are only traces of a fundamentalist outlook which was much more influential during Borges's life, when Francisco Franco (1892-1975) officially and forcefully encouraged the image of an exclusively and exclusionary Catholic Spain during his thirty-five-years dictatorship (1939-75). When "Alhambra" and the "The Chamber of Statues" are read within the context of these conservative accounts, Borges's attempts to debunk them, and to expose that an Islamicate perspective of these same historical facts existed, become even more visible.

Borges's Version of the "Loss" of Spain

The source of "The Chamber of Statues" is Arabic or, at least, Borges had every intention of making his readership feel that that was the case. The tale was originally published in 1933 under the intriguing title "La cámara de las estatuas: Traducido de un texto árabe del siglo XIII" ("The Chamber of Statues: Translated from an Arabic Text of the Thirteenth Century"). It appeared in the Saturday supplement of the Buenos Aires daily *Crítica*. Far from dry and scholastic, the publication offered "popular entertainment in the form of light fiction, humour, puzzles, and from time to time, comic strips. The material [was] generously, even gaudily, printed in colour" (Di Giovanni, *The Lesson* 193). We can surmise that the audience that was meant to read the piece was not educated in Arabic culture or history. Nonetheless, we can safely assume that it had some vague ideas about medieval Spain. To this readership, the lack of indication of a specific source, translator or narrator, together with the clarification that the text is originally

Arabic, is enough to create the impression of an Arabic text. A year and a half after its initial publication, in 1935, "The Chamber of Statues" was included in Borges's first collection of fictional stories, entitled *Historia universal de la infamia* (*A Universal History of Infamy*). A footnote in the collection indicates that "The Chamber of Statues" is inspired by one of the tales of Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890)'s translation of the *Thousand and One Nights* (Di Giovanni, *The Lesson* 196). Yet, there is some truth to the claim that the original text is Arabic. In her article "Jorge Luis Borges y el patrimonio cultural Oriental" ("Jorge Luis Borges and the Oriental Cultural Heritage"), Ebtehal Younes explains that Borges is reshaping two legends circulating in the Arab world. They show up in Arabic travelogues and tales as "The House of Locks in Toledo" and "The Table of Solomon" (67), and both celebrate the conquest of al-Andalus.

"The Chamber of Statues" recounts how before the arrival of the North African army, an illegitimate and evil ruler governs the kingdom of Andalusia. He stubbornly opens the doors of a castle despite the insistent admonitions of his counselors. The numerous locks in the castle bring to mind "The House of Locks in Toledo." Once he opens it, the ruler finds magnificent treasures in each chamber of the palace. The treasures include an elixir that can turn silver into gold and a magic table carved from a single emerald stone. The tale does not state this outright, but this is the "Table of Solomon." In the first room, which gives the story its title, the sovereign observes what seems to be a great number of sculptures representing warriors riding horses. But when the wicked ruler reaches the seventh and final chamber, an inscription explicates that what looks like statues in the first room are actually Arab warriors who will seize his kingdom. "The Chamber of Statues" hints at the illegitimacy of the imprudent Andalusian governor with the significant indication that he is not a member of the royal house. This is a warning that Burton is also

careful to include in his tale. In both Borges's and Burton's versions, the Arab conquest becomes legitimate. Taking something away from a thief is not the same as stealing it from its rightful owner. In addition, the oracular inscription of the seventh chamber, prophesying the Arab seizure, gives the Arab invasion a mythic quality, as if al-Andalus were always destined to become part of an Islamicate world. It was, literally, written. Moreover, the man governing at the time worships Christian idols and is vain and evil. Far from illegitimate and superficial, the Arab presence in Spain becomes inevitable, fatal and even providential.

Borges's attempt to reflect an Islamicate perspective is confirmed when we compare his version with Burton's. There are numerous differences between Borges's and Burton's stories and at first sight they seem to be rather superficial. However, when the discrepancies are explored as a whole they reveal a conscious effort to make the story feel more Islamicate. First, Borges, unlike Burton, characterizes the Visigoth ruler as "evil" (55). This addition strengthens a vision of the Berber-Arab conquest as a fortunate event for Andalusia. Second, the story presents a scene in which the usurper king finds a fantastic mirror in the palace. While Burton's mirror reflects a "counterfeit presentment of the seven climates of the world," the Borgesian mirror reflects the parents and children of anyone who is in front of it. This difference is introduced in order to, once again, remind the reader of the dubious origin of the ruler; his reflection would expose that he is not a member of the royal house. This alteration also infuses a more "Arab" flavor to the text. It is common for Arab names to include the name of the father, and of the father of the father, and so on, three or four times. The mirror, like Arab names, reflects genealogy—a genealogy not indifferent to those Argentines who descend from Spaniards. A third sense of Islamicate perspective is its setting of the conquest as the starting point of the history of Andalusia. Borges's version of the story begins: "In the early days, there was a city in

the kingdom of the Andalusians…" (54).[30] The "early days" refers to the fact that the eighth century is close in time to the *Hijra*, the emigration of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Yathrib (Medina), which marks year 1 of the Islamic calendar (622 CE). But the "early days" also points to the infancy of Andalusia, thus positioning the Romans and the Visigoths who ruled before the Muslims in a role of mere precursors.

Borges's choice of a story that relates the conquest from an Islamicate and not Visigoth or exclusionary "Christian" perspective is in itself a destabilizing gesture because it positions Arabic-speaking Muslims as agents, rather than transient usurpers whose role in history is to be the object of a Reconquest. In both Burton's and Borges's stories, the illegitimate rulers are those governing Andalusia at the time of the providential Berber-Arab conquest. This creates a stark contrast between Borges's account and that of a typical conservative of his time.

That Borges is interested in conjuring up the narratives of "loss" that typically define eighth-century Spain is confirmed by the way in which he makes certain that his Spanish-speaking readership is aware that they are reading about Andalusia, a land with which presumably they are very familiarized. Borges, unlike Burton, highlights its Andalusi setting. While Burton's tale opens by setting the story in a mysterious royal city in the land of Roum, called the City of Labtayt, Borges specifically clarifies, in the very first sentence of the story, that it takes place in the "the kingdom of the Andalusians" (Borges, "A Universal History" 54).[31] Burton does not deny or ignore that Labtayt is in Andalusia, but because he only mentions it when the story is ending, a not-so-informed reader does not necessarily relate it to Spain until the conclusion. By contrast, the reader of Borges's version has Andalusia and Spain in mind from the very beginning. The fact that Borges is particularly interested in the setting is also evident in

[30] "En los primeros días había en el reino de los andaluces una ciudad…" (338).
[31] "el reino de los andaluces" ("Historia universal" 338).

the story's finale. While Burton's account concludes by describing Andalusia almost abstractly as "one of the finest of lands" (101), Borges's story creates a powerful picture which, as I stated above, includes fig trees, watered plains, and men who never suffer the twinge of thirst. Julia A. Kushigian has read this ending as reflecting Borges's penchant for upholding "a dreamlike, majestic quality of the Orient" (36). In Kushigian's view, the "utopialike description of Andalusia is fundamentally an impetus for openness to the Other. The thirst that is quenched through openness to knowledge" (37). I would like to add that with the fig trees, irrigated plains and the mention of "thirst," the tale creates powerful visual and gustatory impressions in his readership. These impressions are deliberately associated to a particular geographical region that is familiar to Borges's readers. Borges simply does not let the readers forget where the story takes place. The allusions to fig trees and watered plains also echo Arabic medieval poetry and reinforce the fact that Borges is trying to convey an Islamicate angle of the 711 CE events. In addition, ending the narration with the conquest of fertile lands adds even more to the triumphant tone of a tale told from the victorious side. No one is talking about the "loss of Spain."[32]

This Islamicate perspective is further confirmed with the inclusion of wording that is typical of the Islamicate world. The way "The Chamber of Statues" refers to the advisors of the illegitimate king is especially revealing. Borges changes Burton's generic "grandees" for "the vizier and the emirs" ("Historia universal" 338).[33] This difference has been attributed to an error

[32] A different perspective can be found in Robert Irwin, according to whom Borges's *Nights* were "anglophile and anglophone" (4838). He argues that not only does Borges "approach the *Nights* through Burton's translation, but his responses to the stories were almost certainly conditioned by the responses of his beloved Stevenson and Chesterton" (4838). Irwin does concede that the context changes the meaning of the stories, and that Borges's *Nights* thus "acquire another meaning when related by a twentieth-century modernist and Argentine fabulist" (4838). Irwin concludes that what the *Nights* furnished Borges were exclusively metaphysical themes—"*dopplegängers*, self-reflexiveness, labyrinthine structures and paradoxes, and especially paradoxes of circularity and infinity" (4849). In the specific case of "The Chamber of Statues," Borges's version of the tale would essentially be about the "recursive nature of destiny" (4849).

[33] "el visir y los emires" ("Historia universal" 338).

in Borges, who failed to understand that Visigoths did not have viziers or emirs (see, e.g., Di Giovanni 202). Although I do not rule out this possibility, considering all the other changes, I am more inclined to think that he purposefully introduced this alteration in order to highlight the Islamicate perspective of the story. Borges was never shy about editing his previous works. If he had made an error he would have had no problem in simply correcting it. Yet, he never does this in "The Chamber of Statues," which adopts an Islamicate purview by depicting the Berber-Arab conquest as providential, by echoing an Islamicate poetic style, and by utilizing an Islamicate vocabulary.

Borges's Version of the Moor's Last Sigh

If "The Chamber of Statues" epitomizes the hope of new beginnings, the poem "Alhambra" is a testimony to the grief that accompanies endings. As Menocal put it, the Alhambra represents the "sepulchral monument" of al-Andalus (706). It was in this citadel that the last Muslim ruler in the Peninsula, Muhammad XII, handed the keys of his family palace to the Catholic Kings. These keys are evoked in the second and last stanza of "Alhambra":

> Vain the scimitar
> before the long lances of the many,
> vain to be the best.
> Pleasant to feel or foresee, grieving king,
> that your delights are goodbyes,
> that the key will be denied you,
> that the cross of the infidel will efface the moon,
> that this pleasant evening will be the last. ("Alhambra")[34]

[34] "Vano el alfanje / ante las largas lanzas de los muchos, / vano ser el mejor. / Grato sentir o presentir, rey doliente, / que tus dulzuras son adioses, / que te será negada la llave, / que la cruz del infiel borrará la luna, / que la tarde que miras es la última" (Borges, "Historia de la noche" 185).

An unmistakably nostalgic and gloomy tone dominates the stanza. However, no mention is made of Muhammad XII's harsh mother, nor is it insinuated, in any way, that he is a coward. In fact, we are told that he is, or thinks of himself as being, nothing less than "the best." "Alhambra" is thus deviating from the traditional script of the Moor's last sigh in more than one way.

Unlike the ominous second part of the poem, the first stanza, which prominently features water, celebrates the riches of al-Andalus:

> Pleasant the voice of the water
> to those wearied by black sand,
> pleasant to the concave hand
> the curving marble of the column,
> pleasant the delicate labyrinths of water
> among the lemon trees,
> pleasant the music of zajal verse,
> pleasant the love and pleasant the pleas
> lifted to a God who stands alone,
> pleasant the jasmine. ("Alhambra")[35]

The water allusions are usually interpreted as a symbol of infinity (Renard 271; Costa Picazo and Zangara 319-20). As indicated previously, this study proposes that, besides standing for infinity, the inclusion of water imagery echoes Arabic nature poetry and thus bolsters the Islamicate perspective of the poem that Borges is attempting to create. In this specific case, the water allusions are also a way to pay homage to another Andalusi convention. Andalusi poetry, like Arabic poetry in general, boasts a noticeable tradition of stimulating a deep dialogue between itself and architecture, and especially landscape architecture (López-Baralt, *Huellas* 24).

Above we find two examples of this tradition. One example is the poem that is carved into the walls of the Nasrid palace; the poem is actually inscribed in the architecture itself. The verses quoted above even celebrate an architectural feature, the fountain that dominates the

[35] "Grata la voz del agua / a quien abrumaron negras arenas, / grato a la mano cóncava / el mármol circular de la columna, / gratos los finos laberintos del agua / entre los limoneros, / grata la música del zéjel, / grato el amor y grata la plegaria / dirigida a un Dios que está solo, / grato el jazmín" (Borges, "Historia de la noche" 185).

Courtyard of Lions. This Nasrid poem is part of architecture and talks about it as well. Borges, who visits the Alhambra twice, is surely familiar with the piece and with the tradition of carving poems into the walls of the palace. He also knows of the other poem which evokes landscape architecture, Abd al-Rahman's "The Palm Tree." "Averroes's Search" mentions how Abd al-Rahman writes his poem in his Rusafa garden. The poem shows to be in deep dialogue with landscape architecture. The poetic voice is situated in a garden in al-Andalus while addressing one of the elements of the garden, a palm. But at another level, the poem evokes the foundational role which the Ummayyad Abd al-Rahman played in Andalusi landscape architecture.

The Rusafa garden mentioned in "Averroes's Search" has an interesting history. Abd al-Rahman grew up in the capital of the Islamic empire, that was then located in Damascus, now Syria. In 750 CE, the Abbasids massacred the Abd al-Rahman's family while they were in a walled city located to the northeast of Damascus. The city's name was, precisely, "Rusafa." The Abbasids left behind Abd al-Rahman, who was then a teenager. Abd al-Rahman travelled to the far West of the empire and ended up becoming the governor of al-Andalus. But he never forgot Rusafa and once established, he built his own, new Rusafa. Rusafa was a "retreat for himself and his new family, and a botanical garden as well, a place where he could cultivate the living things that had been so central to beauty and delight in Syria" (Menocal, *The Ornament* 231). Among those living things, palms and jasmines figure prominently. Not incidentally, jasmines are present in "Alhambra," and also in "Ronda."

Borges is keenly aware of Islamicate architectural styles, and he makes a consistent effort to highlight them in all of his poems and tales that are set in al-Andalus. The poem "Ronda" features minarets, and "On the Diverse Andalusia" mentions a mosque and an arch. The tale "Averroes's Search" brings up a symmetric garden. Traditional Andalusi courtyards make

themselves present in this tale and in the poems "Ronda" and "On the Diverse Andalusia." In this context, it becomes apparent that the poem "Alhambra" highlights an Islamicate architectural style while also echoing two Islamicate poetic traditions: one ties poetry to nature; the other one ties it to architecture. When these traditions overlap, as they do in "Averroes's Search," the boundary distinguishing what is already out there (or what is Divine) and what is made by humans becomes extremely blurry, even indistinguishable. The traditions are distinctly Islamicate, and their inclusion reinforces the Islamicate perspective in Borges's Andalusi-themed writings.

Spanish-Speaking Anti-Semites

"The Chamber of Statues" and "Alhambra" complicate and challenge conservative narratives about medieval Iberia, and Borges's writings on the pogroms and the expulsion of the Jews serve a similar function. Borges is specifically challenging the essentialist narratives that constitute the Hispanic version of anti-Semitism.[36] Probably the main claim of this particular anti-Semite variant is that Jewish peoples can never be Spaniards, because Spaniards are, in essence, representatives of a fundamentalist strand of Catholicism. This fundamentalist version of Catholicism explains both the pogroms and the 1492 expulsion as necessary steps in the development of the Spanish soul that, inevitably, had to eradicate Judaism.

Spain's leading nineteenth-century literary scholar Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo (1856-1912)—whom Borges frequently ridiculed—provides us with an illustrative example of anti-Semitism. In his classic work *Historia de los heterodoxos españoles* (*A History of the Spanish Heterodox*) (1882) he denounces the violence of medieval pogroms, but at the same time he

[36] The Spanish-speaking one constitutes but one variant of anti-Semitism. Jews "were expelled from England in 1290; from France in 1306, 1322 (or 1327), and 1394. They were massacred in Germany in 1298, 1336-1338, and 1348; in France in 1320 and 1321" (Nirenberg 19).

insinuates that the Inquisition was necessary because the "danger of Jewish infection was large and very real" (471).[37] He concludes his account of his nation's history with a celebration of an exclusively Catholic Spain: "Spain, evangelizer of half the world; Spain, hammer of heretics, light of Trent, sword of Rome, cradle of San Ignacio...That is our greatness and our unity: we have no other" (508).[38] According to him, Spain had molded its national character and realized its moments of genuine splendor when it acted as a Catholic hammer of heresies. A similar storyline is found in Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz (1893-1984)'s multi-volume work on medieval Spain: *España: un enigma histórico* (*Spain: A Historical Enigma*). The book, originally published in Buenos Aires in 1956, devotes a long chapter to prove that the Hispanic spirit is totally incompatible with the Jewish one. The chapter is tellingly entitled "Límites de la contribución judaica a la forja de lo español" ("Limits of the Judaic Contributions to the Forging of the Essence of Spain") (163-297). Sánchez-Albornoz has no qualms in reiterating the classic anti-Semite trope of the greedy Jew. He attributes the pogroms and the expulsion to the Jews' supposed insidious habit of imposing extremely high interest rates.

Just like the Jews are blamed for the pogroms and the expulsion, a similar reversal of responsibility also takes place in anti-Semitic explanations for the origins of the Inquisition. These narratives hold that inquisitorial processes imitated Hebraic ones. Therefore, ironically, Judaic judiciary practices that somehow rubbed onto Catholicism, would actually provide the seed for the catastrophic Inquisition. Not surprisingly, both Menéndez Pelayo and Sánchez-Albornoz advance this hypothesis (Kuznitzky 36). This view is held by many other prestigious

[37] "peligro de la infección judaica era grande y muy real" (Menéndez Pelayo, "Historia de los heterodoxos" 471). On the evolution of Menéndez Pelayo's attitude toward Judaism in Spain see: Alvarez Chillida 151-3. Alvarez Chillida's work offers abundant examples of Spanish anti-Semitism.
[38] "España, evangelizadora de la mitad del orbe, España, martillo de herejes, luz de Trento, espada de Roma, cuna de San Ignacio...; esa es nuestra grandeza y nuestra unidad: no tenemos otra" (Menéndez Pelayo, "La historia de los heterodoxos" 508).

scholars of the time, including Castro, who definitively does not fit the traditional anti-Semite mold (Kuznitzky 36).

Fundamentalist narratives trace the origins of pogroms, the expulsion and the Inquisition to different Jewish habits: their greediness in some cases and their juridical routines in others. "Judaism" is held responsible for the Jews' plight. Menéndez Pelayo not only blames the Inquisition on Jews, he also lauds its historical role in safeguarding Spain's national life and as the daughter of the genuine spirit of the Spanish people (Pike 74). This notion of the Spanish spirit being essentially non-Jewish is also evident in Sánchez-Albonoz's writings. In his book, he obsessively repeats that "a sharp opposition divides the Hebraic from the Hispanic" (164).[39] From this fundamentalist perspective, Spanish identity is not only non-Jewish—it is defined by this fact.

Judería/s

A 1933 article by Borges traces the origins of the Inquisition not to Hebrew judiciary practices, but to the distinctively non-Hebrew Albigensian Crusade (*Borges en Revista* 39-45). The article clarifies the context in which Domingo de Guzmán (1170-1221), or Saint Dominic, drafted the procedural rules that would frame the inquisitorial processes. Jewish norms are most definitively absent from the account. The Catholic inquisitorial rules were crafted in France when the Pope authorized violence as a means to force conversions (40). Borges reminds us that those condemned were forced to participate in a humiliating auto-da-fé, a nefarious "ceremony" where they had to parade using a penitential garment similar to a scapula called *sanbenito* as symbol of infamy. The essay concludes with a chilling 1558 episode of several men and women being burned, one of them alive.

[39] "una tajante oposición enfrenta lo hebraico y lo hispano" (Sánchez-Albornoz 164).

Borges also challenges anti-Semitism with his original use of the word "inquisition." Borges's first collection of essays is revealingly titled *Inquisiciones* (*Inquisitions*) (1925). The Preface explains: "This which I call *Inquisitions* (to at least once relieve the word from sanbenitos and clouds of smoke) is partial testimony to my mid-twenties. The rest fits in a bunch of psalms, in *Fervor of Buenos Aires* and in a sign which the corners of Callao published" (Borges, "Prólogo" qtd. in Vaccaro 259).[40] The sign of the Callao corners refers to Borges's first ultraist (avant-garde) pamphlet, which he had plastered in the streets of Buenos Aires including the one named Callao. Borges had wanted to title it *Inquisiciones* but the name was dismissed as absurd by his vanguard associates (Vaccaro 259-60). Now that he was publishing his own book, he could finally use the signifier as he pleased. Years later, Borges would persist with the utilization of the infamous word in another collection of essays, *Otras inquisisiones* (*Other Inquisitions*) (1952). Ironically, some of Borges's essays, some of his inquisitions, denounce the futility and idiocy of anti-Judaism. Borges's inquisition-essays "Definición de Cansinos-Asséns" ("Definition of Cansinos-Asséns") (1924) and "La traducción de un incidente" ("The Translation of an Incident") (1924) both praise Cansinos-Asséns—one of the most prominent defenders of the Sephardic cause during Borges's lifetime. Another of his "inquisitions," entitled "Las alarmas del Doctor Américo Castro" ("The Alarms of Doctor Américo Castro") (1941), denounces the then frequent allusion to a "Jewish problem," as if Judaism needed to be fixed—hence, eliminated. The fact that all these texts are labeled as "inquisitions" is deeply ironic. Borges is appropriating and redefining a signifier that is charged with violence against Jews using it in favor of the Jewish cause.

[40] "Éste que llamo *Inquisiciones* (para aliviar alguna vez la palabra de sanbenitos y humareda) es ejecutoria parcial de mis veinticinco años. El resto cabe en un manojo de salmos, en el *Fervor de Buenos Aires* y en un cartel que las esquinas de Callao publicaron" (Borges, "Prólogo" qtd. in Vaccaro 259).

The passage of *Inquisitions* quoted above refers to psalms. One of these psalms, "Judería" consists of a passionate denunciation of the violence of pogroms:

> Cries that never cease to rise the longing walls
> Walls so steep that men have fallen deep into them.
> Mouths once anciently bled in vain words today are mended
> Transformation like the rag of infinity that the edges of the eaves hang
> And that kneels in the eyes where fear is spying,
> While in a gesture of resignation the autumnal hands are loosened
> And the broken prayers fall from the implacable firmament.
> With their wings folded the cherubim have suspended their breath.
> Before the gate the rabble has dressed in insults like someone wrapped in a rag.
> God is lost and despair of looks seek him.
> Feeling horror of slaughter, the worlds have suspended their breath.
> Some voice invokes their faith: "Adonai echad" "God is one"
> And the Christian crowd attacks with a pogrom in the fists. (Cajero Vázquez 361)[41]

The terseness and paratactic style of the lines makes us think of Biblical poetry. Adele Berlîn identifies terseness as a distinguishing character of Biblical poems, which—like Borges's psalm—tend to be "relatively short, about thirty verses or less in average" (Berlîn 2098). Berlîn expounds on this terseness of Biblical poems when she observes:

> Accompanying the terseness of the lines is the paratactic style by which lines are joined together. In parataxis, the connectiveness between lines may be missing altogether or may consist of the multivalent conjunction *vav*, "and but, or." Thus, the relationship between the lines is often not explicit, opening up both difficulties and opportunities for interpretation. Terseness and parataxis make poetry seem more intense; they give the impression that each word is heavily laden with meaning. (Berlîn 2098)

The impression that each word is heavily laden with meaning is definitively created by Borges's psalm. Another characteristic of Biblical poetry also identified by Berlîn, that also shows up in Borges's psalm, is the "employment of a high degree of parallelism and imagery" (Berlîn 2098).

[41] "Quejas que nunca cesan se alzan las anhelantes paredes / Paredes tan escarpadas que han caído en lo profundo los hombres. / Desangradas antaño en vanas palabras hoy se cicatrizaron las bocas / Mudas como el harapo de infinito que las aristas de los aleros ahorcan / Y que se arrodilla en los ojos por donde el miedo está espiando, / Mientras en el gesto de la resignación las otoñales manos se aflojan / Y las plegarias rotas se despeñan desde el firmamento implacable. / Con las alas plegadas los kerubín han suspendido el aliento. / Ante el portón la chusma se ha vestido de injurias como quien se envuelve en un trapo. / Dios se ha perdido y desesperaciones de miradas lo buscan. / Presintiendo horror de matanzas los mundos han suspendido el aliento. / Alguna voz invoca su fe: 'Adonái iejad' 'Dios es uno' / Y arrecia la muchedumbre cristiana con un pogróm en los puños" (Cajero Vázquez 361).

Borges's poem is charged with imagery, and even imagery that shows up in the Book of Psalms—for instace, the mouth and the eyes that appear in Borges's psalm also show up in Psalm 34 (Berlîn, Brettler, and Fishbane 1318). In Borges's poem we also find parallelisms, as that of suspended breaths, and of the image of rags. Berlîn makes certain observations about these parallelisms in Biblical poems that can easily apply to Borges's psalm:

> Parallelism helps to bind together the otherwise paratactic lines…Another by-product of parallelism is the balance it creates. Scholars have long sought metrical regularity in biblical poetry…More likely, the ancient Hebrew poets embraced a looser system—one in which many lines of a poem are more or less the same length and partake of the rhythm of their parallelism, but without the requirement of precise measurement. (2099)

The rhythm of Borges's psalm, as that of many Biblical psalms, is also created through paratactic lines of similar lengths that are bounded with parallel images.

Although "Judería" does not mention any specific pogrom, the poem could be read as a denunciation of medieval Iberian pogroms. Muslims headed some of these pogroms, but in others the attackers were mostly Catholic—as in Borges's psalm, in which we can visualize a "Christian crowd" that "attacks with a pogrom in the fists." That "Judería" could be set in Medieval Iberia has been suggested by Humberto Núñez-Faraco, who even relates the piece to the 1391 Toledo pogrom ("A note" 92). After all, Toledo has the most renowned *judería*, or Jewish town; Toledo is thus the first city that comes to mind.[42] In addition, the psalm is penned in Palma de Majorca; that is, geographically closer to Toledo than to Buenos Aires or Eastern Europe. It was around this time that Borges was elated to find out that he himself could be a descendant of medieval Iberian Jews. He expressed his need to celebrate the news of his Semitic heritage in an enthusiastic letter addressed to a Jewish friend. The letter was dated October 11, 1920, a mere fortnight before the 24th of that month, when he informed another friend that he had

[42] Judería usually designates the Jewish quarter of the city, but it could also stand for the practice of the Jewish religion, or for a tax imposed on Jews.

written “Judería” (Borges, *Cartas del Fervor* 111, 170). At this point in time, Borges’s fascination with Cansinos-Asséns was at its apogee, and this Spanish polymath also thinks of himself as a descendant of Sephardic Jews. It is entirely possible that Borges counted on having both Spaniards and Argentines among his readership. He made certain that the first edition of *Fervor* was read by his Spanish friends (García 185). Cansinos-Asséns was among them, and he had recently denounced the violence of medieval pogroms (*España y los judíos*). To Cansinos-Asséns, and to the Spanish-speaking readership of the poem, the “Christian mob” could very well be the one that attacked Toledo Jews in 1391.

Yet, the poem is purposely spatially and temporally ambiguous. The haziness of the fierce verses creates the impression of an infernal circularity in which one pogrom becomes all pogroms—the Toledo one could be a Buenos Aires one and could be an Eastern European one. The poem is part of Borges’s first anthology, called *Fervor of Buenos Aires*. In the context of a 1923 collection of poems about Buenos Aires, the violent verses surely call to mind the first pogrom of that city, that took place in January of 1919. The Tragic Week (*Semana Trágica*), as it came to be known, occurred in the context of the repression of a labor uprising at a time in which the recent Russian Revolution had fomented a particularly powerful “red scare” around the globe (Elkin 65). Once the strike was calming down, reactionary mobs shouting ‘death to *rusos*’ attacked the Jewish neighborhood of Buenos Aires (Elkin 65). Even today the Argentine popular imagery categorizes *rusos* (Russians) as Bolsheviks, Jews and anarchists—three traditions with which, not incidentally, Borges identified at different points of his life. But the ambiguous setting of the poem “Pogrom” does not evoke only Buenos Aires; it is so vague that some have read it as insinuating an Eastern European context (García 185). The point here, however, is that although not limited to the Toledo pogrom, the poem definitively evokes it.

In Borges's suggestively titled "Una llave en Salónica" ("A Key in Salonika") (1958) ("El Otro" 254) the Sephardic echoes are unambiguous. Salonika was once a metonymy for Sephardim because it was home to the largest concentration of Sephardic Jews (Pulido Fernández 362, 433). The sheer amount of Jews who lived there even justified it being identified as the "Jerusalem of the Balkans." It was also called "the Mother of Israel, and so it was for four centuries. During the sixteenth century there were more Jews in Salonika than English in London" (Barnstone 139). Tragically Salonika's Jewish community was virtually wiped out during the Second World War. But for many years Salonika was a safe harbor, and to this day its name carries powerful emotional resonances for Sephardic Jews.

For centuries, Jews from Salonika kept their connections to their Iberian origins in a number of ways. They spoke a Romance vernacular called Ladino, "meaning Latin—that is to say, not Hebrew, not Arabic—and that we recognize as a form of old Spanish" (Menocal, *The Ornament* 3500). Borges mentions the "Spanish of Salonika" in his story "El inmortal" ("The Immortal") (1949) ("The Aleph" 182).[43] In some cases, their link to Spain also had a deeply symbolic material manifestation: a key. This key is referenced in the first stanza of "A Key in Salonika":

> Abarbanel, Farias or Acevedo,
> Hurled out of Spain in an unholy sweep
> Of persecution, even now they keep
> The doorkey of an old house in Toledo. (Borges, "Sonetos" 2 trans. in Barnstone 139)[44]

The key reference in Borges's sonnet is not merely metaphorical. It is also based on historical evidence that proves that Sephardic Jews leaving Toledo did carry into the diaspora the keys to

[43] "español de Salónica" ("El Aleph" 533).
[44] "Abarbanel, Farías o Acevedo, / arrojados de España por impía / persecución, conservan todavía / la llave de una casa de Toledo" (Borges, "El otro" 254). I have respected Barnstone's translation, except that I replaced Pinedo with Acevedo.

the houses they would never return to. The keys, as Menocal poignantly put it, became "memory palaces which could be held in the palms of their hands" (3504). Borges chooses to center his poem precisely on these palaces of memories.

The original sonnet also indicates that the last name of the family who owns the key could be Abarbanel, Farías or Acevedo ("Sonetos" 2). In later editions "Acevedo" is replaced by "Pinedo" ("El Otro" 254). The mere mention of these Spanish sounding names highlights that there is no incompatibility between Jewishness and Spanishness, thus undermining anti-Semite claims to a complete mismatch between them. But the list of names is also deeply symbolic. To those familiarized with the most prominent Argentine Jews, the names Pinedo and Acevedo are associated with two successful seventeenth-century men born in the Argentine city of Cordoba—*Córdoba de la Nueva Andalucía*, as it was named originally—: the renowned lawyer and poet Diego de León Pinelo (1608-1671) and Captain Alvaro Rodríguez de Acevedo. Pinelo is better-known than Acevedo. At the beginning of the twentieth century, one of the streets of Cordoba was christened "Pinedo" his honor. The difference in spelling between Pinedo for Pinelo has been attributed to a mistake (Weisbrot and Murciano 23)—one that Borges or his readers could have also made. Pinelo was a member of the most distinguished family of Jewish background to prosper in colonial Argentina (Weisbrot and Murciano 22). The Inquisition persecuted him, but he could escape prison. Captain Rodríguez de Acevedo was not as fortunate. The Inquisition confiscated his vast real estate and he "probably never left prison except to meet an executioner" (Weisbrot and Murciano 23). Interestingly, the names Pinedo and Acevedo can be found on Borges's family tree. Borges used the pseudonym "Manuel Pinedo" in his poem "The *Compadre*." Borges had also pointed to his connection with the Pinedos and the Acevedos in interviews and poems (see, e.g., Cohen, N.p.; Borges, "Acevedo" in "Elogio de la sombra" 381),

which led him to suspect that his forebears may have been Sephardic Jews (Cohen, N.p.). Borges is thus very intimately and personally implicated in this poem. He is surreptitiously inserting his family and himself in the community of Sephardic exiles. Moreover, by including the name Pinedo in the same line in which the last name Abravanel is also evoked, Borges is introducing his family name in the lineage of the famed Abravanels.

With the mention of this distinguished Iberian family, "A Key in Salonika" evokes the celebrated Isaac ben Judah Abravanel (1437-1508), his son Judah Leon (c. 1465-c. 1523) and their twentieth-century descendants. All of them are deeply intertwined with Sephardic traditions. Isaac Abravanel negotiated the iconic postponement of the day in which Jews had to leave Spain, from the original July 31st to the liturgically symbolic August 2nd. In 1492, the second of August coincides with the ninth of Av in the Jewish calendar, which is the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem. Menocal notes how this negotiation of dates reveals that Abravanel understands the "scope of the tragedy as one unparalleled in Jewish history since the destruction of the Temple" (4390). Borges's poem too points out that the Toledo key is

> Like the other temple key someone flung high
> Into the blue (when Roman soldiers bent
> And charged with dreadful flames and discipline)
> And which a hand received into the sky. (Borges, "El otro" 254 trans. in Barnstone 139)[45]

The "other temple key someone flung high" references the story of the Talmud on the burning of the First Temple:

> When the First Temple was destroyed, groups of young priests gathered, holding the keys of the Temple in their hands, and ascended to the Temple roof. They declared: Lord of the universe! As we have failed in our duty as guardians, we return the keys to You! They threw them up, and the Palm of a Hand issued forth and received them; the [young priests] then leaped into the fire. (*The Talmud* 29a trans. in Solomon 330)

[45] "afín a esa otra llave del santuario / que alguien lanzó al azul cuando el romano / acometió con fuego temerario" (Borges, "El otro" 254).

The section in the poem about the "Roman soldiers" who "charged with dreadful flames and discipline" evokes the burning of the Second Temple. The First Temple, Solomon's, was destroyed by the Neo-Babylonians on the ninth of Av, 586 BCE; the Second Temple, which replaced the first one, was lost to the Romans 656 years later, on the ninth of Av, 70 CE.[46] The image of the keys in Borges's poem thus allows us to visualize, once more, a disturbing infinite cycle of incineration and destruction. In the same way that in the poem "Judería" one pogrom becomes all pogroms, in this case one diaspora becomes all diasporas: the one from Toledo becomes the one from Jerusalem—the template for all diasporas. Borges's poem thus evokes for us what David A. Wacks calls "double diaspora" in his volume *Double Diaspora in Sephardic Literature: Jewish Cultural Production Before and After 1492* (2015). Wacks writes: "With the expulsion, the Sepharadim, who had always identified as a people living in diaspora from their Biblical homeland, now found themselves in a second diaspora from their native land where their ancestors had lived since before the Roman times" (1). Borges's key to a house of Toledo, which is (like) the key to the destroyed Temple, becomes a perfect palace of memory of the double diaspora.

The name Abravanel also evokes that of Isaac's son, the erudite and poet Judah Leon Abravanel. Judah Leon was separated from his son in the aftermath of the expulsion, and he dedicates an emotional poem to him. The "Poem to his Son" (1503) could of course be read as if it were addressed exclusively to his son, but it also has been interpreted as addressing all of the Jews who were violently separated from their families. The text of the poem does lend itself to this reading. Abravanel's lament is a testimony to dislocation anxiety as it expresses an intense

[46] As Willis Barnstone remarks, the Spanish Jews of Borges's poem "remember Toledo and an earlier legion of Roman soldiers (under Titus in the Jewish War of 66-70 CE) that pillaged and burned the Temple" (139).

sense of anguish for not being able to see and raise his son, and to pass on to him the scholarly torch. The desolate poetic voice asks:

> To whom will I hand on my scholarship?
> To whom can I pour the nectar from my vines?
> Who will taste and eat the fruit of all
> my learning, of my books, when I am gone?
> …
> I always hoped you would outdo me. (Constable and Zurro 521-2)

These verses, and the poem in general, are directed at the descendants of the exiles who were forcefully estranged from their Jewish families—as were Borges's relatives, the Pinedos.

The name Abravanel is intertwined with Salonika's history. We still do not know if Judah Leon managed to reunite with his son Isaac. Isaac went to live to Portugal after the expulsion. He may have left Portugal in 1507, when Jews were given permission to leave the country. A Jew bearing his name "turned up in Salonica in 1558" (Constable and Zurro 516), and Abravanels could still be found in that city at the beginning of the twentieth century. Indeed, a "Moise Abravanel" is the main source for Angel Pulido (1852-1932)'s description of Salonika in his groundbreaking *Españoles sin patria* (*Spaniards Without a Nation*) (1905) (438-9). He is introduced in the volume as a distant descendant of Isaac and Judah Leon. Pulido's book is landmark in the study of the Sephardic community. Another twentieth-century descendant of Abravanel is the Zionist leader Max Nordau (1849-1923). In an essay about Nordau, Borges points out that Nordaus' thought of themselves as descendants of the Abravanels' ("Nordau," 1951) (*Textos recobrados: 1931-1955* 239). By mentioning the Abravanel name Borges is inserting his family and his poem in a rich Sephardic tradition.

A Medievalist Hebrew Style

"Judería" and "A Key in Salonika" function as counterpoints of Hispanic anti-Semitism, and both create a palpable sense of community. "Judería" alludes to all the Jews subjected to the

violence of pogroms, and "A Key in Salonika" to all of those forced to leave their homes and native lands. The following pages explain how their collective spirit aligns the pieces with what Borges associates to Jewish culture in three distinct ways. First, the startling expressiveness of both poems echoes a poetic genre that boasts deep roots in the Hebrew Bible and in Andalusi poetry: psalms. And psalms tend to have a collective aura. In some of them the poetic voice is a collective "we," but even in those psalms in which the poetic voice is individual, a certain sense of community can often be surmised (Berlîn, Brettler, y Fishbane 1283). This is especially the case in communal laments (Bray 419). Second, as I explain below, the collective feeling is compatible with the Talmudic tradition of equating one Jew with all Jews. Finally, the poems remind us of what has been despairingly called the "lachrymose" school—a set of thinkers who, as Borges, assimilate all persecutions against Jews.

The psalmic resonances are loud and clear in "Judería," as its brutal verses evoke a communal lament. This effect was purposeful. In a 1920 letter, Borges informs a friend that he had written "Judería," and the only detail of the poem that he includes is a mention of its psalmic style (Borges, *Cartas* 170). This poem thus inaugurates what would become a pattern of writing psalms, especially when addressing Jewish themes. The tendency is especially pronounced during the 1920s. In 1924 Borges chooses to publish three poems under the title "Salmos" ("Psalms"). The poems were "Jactancia de la quietud" ("The Pride of Quietness"), "Singladura" ("Direction") and "A Rafael Cansinos-Asséns" ("To Rafael Cansinos-Asséns").[47] The version of "Casi juicio final" ("Almost Doomsday") published around that same time opens with the lines "Walking towards the street horizon I have released my psalms…" (Borges, "Luna de Enfrente"

[47] They originally appear in the August 1924 edition of the vanguard journal *Proa* and they were later included in the anthology *Cuaderno de San Martín* (*San Martin Notebook*) (1929).

106-7 qtd. in Aizenberg, "Cansinos-Asséns" 539).[48] "Judería" is thus most definitively a psalm written in an era in which Borges was impersonating an avant-garde David of his age.

The case of "A Key in Salonika" is different. If in 1924 Borges chooses to publish three poems under the rubric "Psalms," in 1958 "A Key in Salonika" appears under the title "Sonetos" ["Sonnets"] (Borges, "Sonetos"). This is far from accidental. In his thirties, Borges goes through a crisis and abandons some of the stylistic habits of his youth. He tries to become simpler. His opinions become less drastic. His early violent stance against *modernismo* becomes more nuanced. He even ends up praising some qualities of poets he had despised when he was younger, as Lugones and Rubén Darío (1867-1916). In his twenties and early thirties, he had thought of the Hebraic style as being totally incompatible with *modernismo*, but his opinions on this issue change too. His youthful position is epitomized in a harsh 1931 review on a book written by the Argentine Jewish poet César Tiempo (1906-1980), *Libro para la pausa del sábado* (*Book for the Saturday Rest*) (1930) (*Textos recobrados: 1931-1955* 15). His more nuanced approach, in turn, is symbolized by his 1968 homage to another Argentine poet, Grünberg (Borges, *Textos recobrados 1956-1986* 126-8). Although Grünberg was a declared atheist, he was raised as a Jew, and his poems were steeped in Jewish themes. While in 1931 an emphatic Borges thinks that Tiempo needs to learn that the Hebraic style is definitively not that of Lugones, in 1968 the Lugones influence on Grünberg is not denounced in such callous terms. In his sixties, Borges can even acknowledge that Lugones was a "great verbal poet" (Borges, *Textos recobrados 1956-1986* 126).[49] Just one year after his homage to Grünberg, Borges would reminisce about his youthful aspiration to be a psalmist in the preface to *Elogio de la sombra* (*In*

[48] "En pos del horizonte de las calles he soltado mis psalmos…" (Borges, "Luna de enfrente" 106-7 qtd. in Aizenberg, "Cansinos-Asséns y Borges" 539).
[49] "gran poeta verbal" (Borges, *Textos recobrados 1956-1986* 126).

Praise of Darkness) (1969): "I once longed for the vast breath of Psalms" (354).[50] In his sixties, psalms are a thing of the past. Borges not only goes through a change of heart; he also edits his youth poems in order to better reflect his newfound simplicity. In later editions of his works he would even eliminate "Judería" from *Fervor*. [51] He would also erase the references to "psalms" from his poem "Almost Doomsday."[52]

"A Key in Salonika" is a product of this mature Borges, who does not attempt to pose as a psalmist and who even tries to eliminate almost all traces of this genre. Yet, the sonnet is not completely lacking of psalmic resonances. As mentioned above, its emotional verses do make an indirect allusion to Abravanel's "Poem to his Son." In addition, a sense of community is palpable in "A Key in Salonika," and this is a remnant of a prior psalmic influence. Moreover, even though in his sixties Borges acknowledges Lugones's influence on Grünberg, he shows a marked preference for Grünberg's late works, in which he had abandoned the pronounced *modernismo* of his youth. *Modernismo* is still not the ideal channel for a "Hebrew style."

One of the most renowned specialists in Borges's relationship to Judaism, Edna Aizenberg, examines how and when Borges became interested in psalms and in Judaism. In her article "Cansinos-Asséns y Borges: En busca del vínculo judaico" ("Cansinos-Asséns and Borges: In Search of the Jewish Link") (1980), Aizenberg convincingly links Borges's penchant for psalms with his admiration for Cansinos-Asséns. Cansinos-Asséns also chose this particular poetic form in order to explore Jewish themes, and Borges confessed to having aped the Spanish intellectual in his youth (534). Creating this sense of community is characteristic of Cansinos-

[50] "Yo anhelé, alguna vez, la vasta respiración de los psalmos" (Borges, "Elogio de la sombra" 354).
[51] The poem "Judería" disappears for *Fervor de Buenos Aires* in 1958 (Cajero Vázquez 239).
[52] The specific reference to psalms in "Almost Doomsday" was eliminated in later editions of *Moon Across the Street*. The version of this poem included in the *Obras completas* (*Complete Works*) does not allude to Psalms (Borges, "Luna de enfrente" 69).

Asséns's psalms. For instance, a collective poetic voice sings his "Canto de los desterrados que retornan con motivo de la inauguración de la sinagoga de Madrid" ("Song of the Returning Exiles for the Inauguration of the Synagogue of Madrid") (1919) (*España y los judios* 283-5). It impersonates the community of Jewish exiles who decide to "return" to Spain during the first decades of the twentieth century. We can therefore be certain "A Key in Salonika" and especially "Judería" are connected to Jewish tradition by echoing the Book of Psalms and Cansinos-Asséns.

Borges's immediate inspiration was Cansinos-Asséns, but by writing psalms both of them were standing on the shoulders of Andalusi poets. The fact that Borges considers that the "Hebraic style" has deep connections to the medieval period can be inferred from the prominence he assigns to Andalusi poets when he comments on the works of different Jewish novelists and poets of his time: Cansinos-Asséns, Tiempo and Grünberg. Borges links all three writers to Iberian medieval poets.

The first time that Borges brings this connection to our attention is in 1926, when he comments on a novel written by his master Cansinos-Asséns. The novel, not incidentally, had the Hebrew-sounding title *Las luminarias de Hanukah* (*The Luminaries of Hanukkah*) (1924). I mentioned above that Cansinos-Asséns was a prominent defender of the Sephardic cause. The reason that spurred him to write on this particular topic was that he suspected that his ancestors were Jews who were persecuted by the Inquisition. After finding his last name in the archives of the Inquisition, Cansinos-Asséns decided to convert to Judaism, to get circumcised, and to start writing extensively about Jewish themes in a "Hebrew" style—he became, as Borges put it, a *honoris causa* Jew (Borges, "Cesar Tiempo: Libro para la pausa del sábado," *Textos recobrados* 15). Unlike the poets of the Golden Age, Cansinos-Asséns did not write in Hebrew (or Arabic), but in Spanish; however, just like the poets of the Golden Age, he writes in a style reminiscent of

the Book of Psalms and the Song of Songs. Cansinos-Asséns thus positions himself as a belated poet of the Hebrew Golden Age, as if trying to erase some of the effects of the suspension the Inquisition imposed on Peninsular Hebrew poetics. It is therefore appropriate that in his glowing review Borges emphasizes that *The Luminaries of Hanukkah* was penned in the nation that once was of both the Grand Inquisitor Tomás de Torquemada (1420-1498) and the eminent Jewish poet Judah Halevi (c. 1075-1141)—two Iberians who exerted a profound effect on the Iberian about which Borges is writing about, Cansinos-Asséns (Borges, *El tamaño* 95-9). Borges also notes that the same nostalgia that motivated the writing of psalms during the Golden Age is palpable in every page of Cansinos-Asséns's novel. Borges thus recognizes Cansinos-Asséns as a sort of psalmist, in the tradition of the famed Halevi.

A few years later Borges writes a review on Tiempo. This time Borges lists a series of names that he associates with the Hebrew style. The list includes Halevi but also Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021-c.1058) and Sem Tob (c.1290-c.1369). Borges writes that "there is a Hebrew style, like a natural breathing of Jewish poetry…That breathing, that way, is the one of the most incompatible men of letters that come from Abraham...the one of David, of Isaiah, of Jesus, of Ibn Gabirol, of Judah Halevi, of the Rabbi Shem Tob, of Heine, of James Oppenheim, of Spire, of Rafael Cansinos-Asséns, *honoris causa* Jew, of Werfel…" (*Textos recobrados: 1931-1955* 15).[53] The inclusion of Jesus in the list is significant in that it reminds Christian anti-Semites that Jesus himself was Jewish. More critically, of the eleven names included in the list as exemplars of the "Hebraic style," three are from al-Andalus. It is no coincidence that the Andalusi poets are

[53] "…hay un estilo hebreo, una como respiración natural de la poesía judaica…Esa respiración, ese modo, es el de los más incompatibles hombres de letras que proceden de Abrahám…el de David, el de Isaías, el de Jesús, el de Aben Gabirol, el de Yejudá Levi, el del rabí Sem Tob, el de Heine, el de James Oppenheim, el de Spire, el de Rafael Cansinos Asséns, judío *honoris causa*, el de Werfel..." (Borges, "Cesar Tiempo: Libro para la pausa del sábado," *Textos recobrados* 15).

placed immediately after Biblical figures like David, and right before nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors. The list is acknowledging that these medieval poets were the bridge between the Hebrew of the Psalms of David and a more current Hebraic style.

Borges also acknowledges the role of Andalusi poets as mediators in 1940, when he pens an enthusiastic preface to a collection of poems by Grünberg. As Alan Astro explains, the title of Grünberg's book, *Mester de Judería* (*Jewry's Art*) "plays upon two medieval Spanish literary genres: the *mester de clerecía* [clergy's or scholar's art] and the *mester de juglaría* [minstrel's art]" (Astro 2). In his preface Borges is quick to pick up on this medievalist inspiration, and positions Grünberg as an inheritor of Sem Tob. The comparison is appropriate. Sem Tob has actually been linked to the tradition of the *mester de clerecía* or, as Paloma Díaz-Mas put it, to a *mester de clerecía rabínica* ("Rabbinical scholar's art") (330).

Borges thus associates Tiempo and Grünberg, these two Argentine Jewish poets of Ashkenazi origins, with Sephardic medieval Jews. This is not just one of Borges's flights of fancy. The relationship speaks to the project of neo-Sephardism through which first-generation Argentine-Jewish writers of the time adapt to Argentine society. This project draws heavily from medieval Iberian times. Just as during the Middle Ages Jews and Christians lived together and spoke in Spanish, in this underlying narrative they coexist in Argentina. Tiempo and Grünberg are just two among the several Argentine Jewish poets of Ashkenazi origin who participate in this project. The work that epitomizes neo-Sephardism is Alberto Gerchunoff (1889-1950)'s celebrated *Los gauchos judios* (*The Jewish Gauchos*) (1910). Aizenberg detects an "intentional Sephardism" in this work, defined by a "deliberate equating of Modern Argentina with medieval Spain, and of the Ashkenazim of the pampa with Iberian Jews of the Golden Age" (*Books and*

Bombs 21). Not incidentally, Borges eloquently praises *The Jewish Gauchos*, on repeated occasions.

The rank of Jewish Andalusi poets as mediators is no secret among those who, like Borges, are acquainted with the medieval Jewish tradition. It is especially revealed in a frequently quoted poem written by Samuel Ibn Naghrillah (993-c.1056). Ibn Naghrillah, also known as "Samuel the Prince," is the founding father of the new Hebrew poetry that flourished in medieval Iberia. In a Hymn of Praise (a style of Psalm) he thanks the Lord:

> …
> He ravaged my enemies with pain,
> easing my own.
> Someone objected:
> Who are you to pay homage?
>
> I am, I answered, the David of my age! (Menocal, *The Ornament* 1394)

Ibn Naghrillah assigns himself the title of David of his age and revitalizes Hebrew by using it in non-liturgical contexts (Menocal, *The Ornament* 1394; López-Baralt, *Huellas* 27). The three Andalusi poets which Borges mentions, Judah Halevi, Sem Tob and Ibn Gabirol, followed in his footsteps. A fourth poet should be added to this list: the last Hebrew poet of the Andalusi golden age, the twelfth-century poet Abraham Ibn Ezra. Borges references him in his story "The Secret Miracle," indicating that he is familiar with Ibn Ezra's work.

The allusion to this specific poet in this particular tale is extremely significant. "The Secret Miracle" tells us about the Nazi execution of a Jewish intellectual who had written on Ibn Ezra. Borges's tale "Deutsches Requiem" (1946), written at around the same time, is also about Nazism, and also references Sepharad. It tells about the execution of another Jewish poet, whose suggestive name was David Jerusalem—as Ibn Naghrillah, another David of his age. He is

depicted as a "prototypical Sephardic Jew" ("The Aleph" 232).[54] By incorporating these Sephardic references in his tales about Nazism, Borges is drawing a parallel between the Nazi catastrophe and the Andalusi one. This connection is also created in Borges's preface to Grünberg's *Mester de Judería* (1940), which acidly observes that despite its long story of violence against Jews, and "despite the inquisitorial bonfire and Nazi revolver" anti-Semitism is still simply ridiculous ("Prólogos" 74).[55] Grünberg also draws the parallel. In his poem "Reparto" ("Allocation") (1965) he asks:

> And who begot and bore
> the Inquisitional bonfire?
> Who the death camps?
> Who the gas chambers? (Grünberg, "Junto a un Río de Babel" 246)[56]

According to a well-known eulogy written by Ibn Ezra in the wake of Almohad persecutions, the maltreatment of Andalusi Jews echoed the one suffered by Maghrebi Jews. In his eulogy, Ibn Ezra "appears to be speaking as the personified voice of the exiled Jewish communities of al-Andalus and the Maghrib" (Constable y Zurro 265). In "The Secret Miracle" and in "Deutsches Requiem," Borges again creates this sense of ominous circularity, where one persecution becomes all persecutions—the one of European twentieth-century Jews is the one of medieval Jews from Iberia that in turn is the one of the Jews of Maghreb, which is reminiscent of the burning of the temple of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is, not coincidentally, David's last name.[57]

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[54] "prototipo de judío sefardí" (Borges, "El Aleph" 579).
[55] "a pesar de la hoguera inquisitorial y del revólver nazi" (Borges, "Prólogos" 74).
[56] "¿Y quién engendró y parió / la hoguera inquisitorial? / ¿Quién los campos de la muerte? / ¿Quién las cámaras de gas?" (Grünberg, "Junto a un Río de Babel" 246).
[57] For a lucid analysis of Borges's "Deutsches Requiem" see Aizenberg, "Deutsches Requiem 2005." Aizenberg includes in her article a comprehensive account of the reception of the story. Some specialists, including her, read the tale as a powerful denunciation of Nazism (Gómez López-Quiñones, *Borges y el nazismo* 135-221; Zenkman; Stavans, *Borges, the Jew* 35-46). By contrast, other scholars insist on that the story is not actually about Nazism (see, e.g., Bell-Villada 197; Sturrock 104).

To this list of catastrophes, we could add many others. We could include, for example, the massacre of the Jews in the city of York in 1190. A twelfth-century Jewish writer from the region we now call Germany, Ephrain of Bonn (1132-1197), documented this massacre and also wrote a martyrology in the wake of the massacres of Jews in the Rhineland, England and France which accompanied the Second Crusade. His and Ibn Ezra's work provide early instances of what has been disparagingly called the "lachrymose school."

The so-called lachrymose school has been criticized for reducing the history of Judaism, since the fall of Jerusalem, to a progression of tragedies, a string of tears and martyrdom in which each incident of persecution foreshadows another (Solomon, *Judaism* 597, Nirenberg 7). Echoing this poetic tradition, many historians "have drawn a line of mounting intolerance from the Rhineland massacres of the First Crusade, through the expulsions and massacres of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, through German ritual murder trials and Russian pogroms, to Kristallnacht and the concentration camps" (Nirenberg 7). This lachrymose approach has some notable drawbacks, mostly related to the fact that they overlook the particularities, genesis and context of each persecution, on the one hand, and the joyful and positive aspects of Jewish history on the other. A recent trend in historiography has thus tended to replace the homogeneity and teleology implied by the lachrymose school with a perspective that emphasizes difference and contingency—in some cases, for example, an attack on Jews may have been a way to protest an attempt by a king with whom they were close to expand his authority by deciding cases which many thought exceeded his jurisdiction, or by rising taxes (Nirenberg 7, 43-68). Flattening the differences between multiple persecutions against Jews may be poetic, but it is not sound from a historiographical standpoint. Another trend in historiography, which also defines itself in opposition to the lachrymose school, consists in

emphasizing the "*creative* history of Judaism" (Solomon, *Judaism* 597). As defined by Norman Solomon in his 2014 introduction to Judaism: "The suffering and the persecutions and the forced migrations cannot be denied, but amazingly throughout the centuries the spirit has flourished with a still unending procession of poets and saints, of philosophers and of Bible commentators, of grammarians and Talmudists, of lawyers and satirists and pastors and schoolmen, of unsung humble women and men of faith" (6-7). Judaism, in other words, is not defined by homogenous persecutions and tears.

Borges does echo the lachrymose school when he draws parallels between multiple persecutions. However, a comparison between Borges's poem "A Key in Salonika" and Ibn Ezra's eulogy proves to be quite revealing. Both Borges and Ibn Ezra draw parallels between the persecutions of Andalusi Jews with other historic persecutions, but the tone of Ibn Ezra's lament is much gloomier than Borges's "A Key in Salonika." Ibn Ezra cries "I shave my head and weep bitterly for the exile of Seville— / For its nobles are corpses and their sons captives, / Their elegant daughters handed over to a foreign religion" (Constable y Zurro 266). Compared to this anguished pitch, Borges's poem seems optimistic. The sonnet does state that Jews from Salonika had neither hope (of returning) nor fear (of being harassed).

The parallel between multiple catastrophes does have its disadvantages, but at the same time it can function as an effective denunciation of the cruelty to which Jews were subjected while mirroring the Talmudic tradition of equating one Jew with all Jews. Borges is deeply aware of this belief, and attempts to reflect it through the collective spirit of both "Judería" and "A Key in Salonika." This equation of one Jew with all Jews also shows up in his essays on Nordau and Cansinos-Asséns, and in his poem "Israel" (1967).

The article "Nordau" explains that even if Nordau was agnostic and of Sephardic origins, he was so deeply moved by the 1881 Russian pogrom that he returned to Judaism. Borges summarizes: "To simplify the facts, to give them the value of a parable, we can imagine one pogrom or—and this would conform more to Talmudic traditions—a single dead Jew" (*Textos recobrados: 1931-1955* 239).[58] The same topic, of one Jew being all Jews, is also implied in one of Borges's more emotional poems on Cansinos-Asséns, a sonnet entitled "Rafael Cansinos-Asséns" (1965). The verses read:

> He drank as if drinking a deep wine
> The Psalms and the Song of Songs
> And he felt that that was his sweetness
> And he felt that that was his destiny. (Borges and Costa Picazo 557)[59]

Yet again, the individual feels as his own the sweetness and fate of a whole community.

The free-verse poem "Israel" affords us the most striking example of this same idea of one Jew being all Jews. The poem is structured around the anaphora "a man":

> A man incarcerated and bewitched
> a man condemned to be the serpent
> that keeps the infamous gold
> a man condemned to be Shylock
> …
> is Spinoza and the Baal Shem and the Kabbalists
> …
> an obstinate man who is immortal
> …
> beautiful like a lion at noon. (Stavans, "Borges's Zionist Bent")[60]

The "a man" anaphora has been read as highlighting the humanity of Jews. In this view, the poem would challenge the de-humanization and demonization of Jews which is

[58] "Para simplicar los hechos, para darles valor de parábola, podemos imaginar un solo pogrom o —y esto se ajustaría más a las tradiciones talmúdicas— un solo judío muerto" (Borges, *Textos recobrados: 1931-1955* 239).
[59] "Bebió como quien bebe un hondo vino / Los Salmos y el Cantar de la Escritura / Y sintió que era suya esa dulzura / Y sintió que era suyo aquel destino" (Borges and Costa Picazo 557).
[60] "Un hombre encarcelado y hechizado / un hombre condenado a ser la serpiente / que guarda un oro infame / un hombre condenado a ser Shylock / … / es Spinoza y el Baal Shem y los cabalistas / … / un hombre que se obstina en ser inmortal / … / hermoso como un león al mediodía" (Borges, "Elogio de la sombra" 375).

commonplace among anti-Semites, and would further "the poem's message of the Jews' ceaseless victimization" (Silverstein 35-6). In addition to performing these important functions, the anaphora echoes the common biblical Hebrew phrase *'ish 'ish*, meaning "'a man, a man', i.e., 'every man,' by extension 'every person'" (Elman 1853). The anaphora therefore crystallizes the Talmudic tradition of a single man being all men, of one Jew being all Jews—and, in this particular case, of all these Jews becoming the very substance of Israel. The anaphora also evokes the distinctively Jewish poetic tradition of drawing parallels between multiple persecutions, and performs an even more important function: it breaks the infernal cycle of victimization by turning "Jews" into "Spinoza and the Baal Shem and the Kabbalists"—not exclusively victims but also agents, highly influential philosophers, theologians and academics.

The "man" even becomes a beautiful lion, and this is an animal with deep symbolic resonances. As Wacks notes, the lion is often referenced in the Old Testament, the Talmud and Midrashic texts. In the Old Testament the ferocity of the lion makes it a suitable metaphor to represent either God or a military enemy (*Framing* 119). Also in the Old Testament "the lion is symbolic of the tribe of Judah, for their bravery in battle" (*Framing* 120). Wacks also observes that with time, "commentators widened the semantic field associated with the lion so that by the mid-fourteenth century, Jacob ben Asher (1270?-1340) of Toledo uses a lion to signify an outstanding scholar" (*Framing* 120). Borges could not have chosen a more appropriate figure to break the cycle of violence. He wrote the poem to celebrate the existence of Israel after the Holocaust—if there ever was an appropriate occasion to break the cycle of violence that a lachrymose approach sometimes seems to imply, this was it. That is to say, it was a perfect opportunity to mirror some aspects of the lachrymose approach—so as to not gloss over the

suffering—while simultaneously offer a vision of a path out of it. The man who was incarcerated and bewitched, the man who was forced to be Shylock, finally became a beautiful lion.

As in the essay on Max Nordau, or the poem on Cansinos-Asséns, in the poem "Israel" one Jew becomes all Jews. In this context, the spatial and temporal ambiguity of "Judería" comes to the fore as a way of replicating the Talmudic tradition of equating one pogrom with all pogroms, one Jew with all Jews. This idea is also present in "A Key in Salonika," which turns the Abravanels, the Farias and Pinedos into a synecdoche of all the Jews who were uprooted from their communities and their descendants. The sense of kinship created by "Judería" and "A Key in Salonika" has the specific purpose of putting both poems into conversation with the ancient Judaic tradition of Psalms, it carries deep theological undercurrents rooted in the Talmud and it also echoes the Jewish poetic tradition of drawing parallels between several persecutions against Jews.

Forging a Polychromatic Spanish Language

The storyline inferred from "The Chamber of Statues," "Alhambra," "Judería" and "A Key in Salonika" stands in stark opposition with popular myths about Count Julian, the Moor's last sigh and medieval Jews. From a formal perspective, Borges's writings echo nature poetry, an Arabic genre, when telling the story of the Muslim conquest and of the last Muslim ruler. Borges's pieces on Jewish themes, on the other hand, are reminiscent of psalms. I have advanced how the utilization of these formal devices strengthens the either Islamicate or Judaic standpoint adopted. But I have not yet expounded upon the main implication of Borges's deployment of these forms. The utilization of medievalist devices, that are usually associated to Islam and to Judaism, defies a notion which is at the very heart of fundamentalist and exclusionary forms of philology and of conservative medievalisms in general: that the Spanish language adheres to a fundamentalist

version of Catholicism. Of course, this is not the position adopted by all Catholics, but by those who prefer to inhabit its fundamentalist strands.

Language is not a fixed structure. Every individual, but especially the poet, is a new Adam, naming things for the first time. Poets not only utilize the language, but they also craft it through their vocabulary, stylistic devices, metaphors and images. Grünberg is deeply aware of this and often makes it a topic of his poems. His case is paradigmatic because his poetry constantly draws attention to the fact that he is writing about Jewish themes in the supposedly exclusionary "Catholic" language of the Inquisition.

Above I mentioned how Borges compares Grünberg with Sem Tob. There is nothing incidental about this parallel. Sem Tob's *Proverbios morales* (*Moral Proverbs*) (c. 1290-c.1369) is the only canonical Castilian literary work written by an openly Jewish Spaniard. It draws heavily from Jewish sources, including the Talmud and Ibn Gabirol. It also deploys certain formal elements that are characteristic of the Semitic world; he utilizes the syllabic rhyme typical of Hebrew and Arabic rhymed prose (Díaz-Mas 342). As Sem Tob, Grünberg was writing about Jewish topics in a Romance language. This is an integral part of Grünberg's project: to demonstrate that the Spanish language could also be Jewish. For example, Grünberg incorporates Jewish traditions in the Castilian language when he amusingly coins the neologism *circuncida* after noting the lack of a Spanish term for mohel:

> Among those present there was a man
> For whom in Spanish there is no name.
>
> Along the lines of suicide and homicide
> I shall call him circumside. (Grünberg, "Mester de Judería" 182 trans. in Astro 3)[61]

[61] "Entre la gente había un hombre / que en español no tiene nombre. / Según *suicida* y *homicida* / lo trataré de *circuncida.*" (Grünberg, "Mester de Judería" 182).

This is a telling extract of "Circuncisión" ("Circumcision") (1940), one of the poems Borges praises in his preface to *Mester de Judería*. As he constantly does in other pieces, Grünberg "circumcises" the Spanish language, making it Jewish. He leaves his Judaic material mark on the same language of the inquisitor. Alan Astro utilizes the symbol of the "circumcision of the tongue" to epitomize Grünberg's project, and quotes from his expressive poem "Remanentes" ("Remnants") (1965):

> Gentiles—how genteel!—have made for themselves
> A great auto-da-fé, burning Jews
> With their vile, foreign flesh,
> With their fanatical, impious bones.
>
> I, in turn—a nice Jewish trick—have made
> A great circumcision of my Romance tongue,
> With its twisted use of adjectives,
> With its venal, second-hand rhetoric.
>
> Don't you see why a troubadour would extirpate
> The fineries from his polychromatic language?[62]
> To mourn the remainder of my people,
> The remainder of my language suffices for me. (Astro 10)[63]

I quote this poem in its entirety because it symbolizes the linguistic project of Grünberg, but also of Borges. Positioning themselves as medieval troubadours and psalmists, they both model and forge a multicolored language—one that is, per definition, not exclusively Catholic. In a world like the Argentine one, which at that time was more than ninety-percent Catholic, the Castilian language can include some Jewish input and influences. Astro brilliantly summarizes Grünberg's strategy:

[62] Only this couplet does not respect Astro's translation: "Don't you see why a troubadour would extirpate / Elegance from his multicolored language?" (Astro 10).
[63] "Los gentiles se han hecho –¡qué gentiles!– / su gran auto de fe con los judíos, / con sus carnes exóticas y viles, / con sus huesos fanáticos e impíos. / Yo me he hecho a mi vez –linda judiada– / mi gran circuncisión con el romance, / con su adjetivación escarolada, / con su venal retórica de lance. / ¿Ni comprendéis que un trovador extirpe / las galas de su lengua policroma? Para endechar el resto de mi estirpe, / me alcanza con el resto de mi idioma. (Grünberg, "Junto a un Río de Babel" 275).

> Grünberg leaves a trace on Spanish, performs his "gran circuncisión con el romance" [great circumcision with the Romance tongue], purifying the language, undercutting, as if were, the right of Gentiles to the adjective gentil [genteel], making a "judiada" [nasty Jewish trick] into something lindo [nice]. It is not Jews, supposedly merchants eager for gain, who are "venal," who deal in second-hand goods [mercancía de lance]; rather, it is Spanish which has a "venal retórica de lance" ["venal, second-hand rhetoric"]. (10)

Grünberg exploits the potential of the arbitrary nature of the relationship between signifier and signified in order to redefine terms that are usually associated with anti-Semitism, as is the case of the signifier "venal." Just as Grünberg redeploys and redefines the "venal" adjective, Borges redefines the word "inquisition." In his essays, poems and stories Borges forges and shapes the Spanish language. Borges's use of explicitly Judaic and Islamic(ate) forms is a manifestation and performance of a Spanish tongue that is not exclusively Catholic; Borges's poetic forms thus crystallize his position on a multi-religious Spanish history and language.

PART 1: A BORGESIAN NEW PHILOLOGY

Chapter 2: "Spain of Islam, of the Kabbalah"

In the opening scene of Borges's poem "España" ("Spain") (1964) we see the legendary knight imagined by Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616). The poem also evokes the classic "Dark Night of the Soul," that makes us think of the Spanish mystic and poet Saint John of the Cross (1542-1591).[64] He and Cervantes are the only canonical Castilian writers the poem brings to mind. The line dedicated to the Spanish Middle Ages reads "Spain of Islam, of the Kabbalah" ("El Otro" 309).[65] Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar (1043-1099), the protagonist of the famed *Poem of the Cid* and a national hero almost as important as the Quixote, is conspicuously absent in Borges's "Spain." Not only there is no Cid; there is no medieval Castilian either. If we were to evaluate Borges's attitude toward medieval Iberia based solely on his poem "Spain," we would deduce that his interests lie exclusively in the Arabic of Islam, and the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Kabbalah. This view is consistent with our findings from the previous Chapter: that Borges's writings insist in bringing to the forefront Andalusi poetry written in Semitic languages. This chapter shifts our attention from Semitic languages to Spanish.

The texts examined in the following pages were written in different stages of Borges's long life. They include an essay on Jorge Manrique published during the 1920s and a short article on the *Book of Good Love* published in the 1980s. These two articles have not been translated into English and have received little academic attention. The essay "Magias Parciales del Quijote" ("Partial Enchantments in the Quixote"), first published in 1949, is better known. A survey of these and other essays reveals that two different threads weave through all of Borges's comments on Spain. One is his clear attempt to construct a Spanish history in which different

[64] "Noche Oscura del Alma" (Borges, "El Otro" 309).
[65] "España del Islam, de la cábala" (Borges, "El Otro" 309).

cultures and religions exist side by side and influence each other. Borges's Spain of Islam and of Judaism was not limited to medieval writings in Semitic languages—it also had dramatic consequences on classic Castilian works, produced during the Middle Ages and beyond. The second pattern in Borges's writings about Spain is the repetitive evocation of the *Thousand and One Nights.*

Including the *Nights* in the landscape of medieval Spain is a tradition shared by the leading twentieth-century literary scholars of the Spanish-speaking world. In his volume *Orígenes de la novela* (*On the Origins of the Novel*) (1915) Menéndez Pelayo comments that *Count Lucanor* belongs to the same family as the *Thousand and One Nights* (144). In his highly influential *The Structure of Spanish History* Castro brings up the *Nights* on several occasions. He mentions, for instance, how it is common for tales of this anthology to alternate prose with poetry. He detects that this poetry-prose combination can also be found in the *Book of Good Love*, and presents this coincidence as yet another proof of its Arabic inspiration (454). A comment on the *Thousand and One Nights* can also be found in the preface of the enormously popular *Poemas arábigoandaluces* (*Poems from Arab Andalusia*) (1930), authored by the leading Spanish Arabist of the twentieth century Emilio García Gómez (1905-1995). He observes that the civilization of medieval Cordoba was "the same civilization of the Baghdad of the *Thousand and One Nights*" (28).[66] The renowned novelist and essayist Juan Goytisolo also connects the *Nights* with Spain. In his essay "L'invention de Cervantes et ses origines" ("The Invention of Cervantes and Its Origins") (2000) he suggests that Cervantes was influenced by the Oriental literature that had been circulating in Castile since the thirteenth century, and reminds us that Cervantes had direct access to Oriental stories during his stay in North Africa. Goytisolo

[66] "la misma civilización de la Bagdad de *Las mil y una noches*" (García Gómez, *Poemas arábigoandaluces* 28).

proposes that this exposure to Oriental literature inspired Cervantes to incorporate certain narrative novelties that we associate with the *Quixote* and with the birth of the novel. Among them we find the notion of "the story of the story of the story of the *Thousand and One Nights*" and the incorporation of the narrator within the stories he tells us (9).[67] In the mind of these and other influential writers, the *Thousand and One Nights* are not part of a completely foreign world. The tales stand in a paradoxical position—simultaneously familiar and exotic, close and from a faraway land, originally belonging to a distinctively Semitic world yet somehow connected with Spain and with the Spanish language. It is not incidental that those intellectuals who include the *Nights* in the literary history of Spain usually do so to endorse the Arabic thesis, meaning that they argue for the influence of Arabic poems and tales in early Castilian works. This is also the case with Borges.

Manrique's *Stanzas on the Death of His Father*

Let me begin with Borges's approach to Manrique's celebrated *Stanzas on the Death of His Father*. The stanzas stand, even today, as one of the more popular works in the history of Spanish poetry, known not only to academics but also to the general public. Four of Borges's essays analyze or mention Manrique, and they were published in the five decades that separate the 1920s from the 1960s. Their titles are: "Las coplas acriolladas" ("The Creolized *Stanzas*") (1926), "Las coplas de Jorge Manrique" ("The Stanzas of Jorge Manrique") (1928), "The Translators of the *Thousand and One Nights*" and "The Metaphor" (1967). Manrique is also evoked in the poem "La jonction" ("The Junction") (1984), penned—or, more precisely,

[67] "le récit du récit du récit des *Mille et Une Nuits"* (Goytisolo, "L'invention de Cervantes" 9).

dictated—by a blind octogenarian Borges.[68] This Spanish medieval poet was thus a protagonist of both the beginning of Borges's literary life during the 1920s and its end during the 1980s.

In his article on Borges's medieval Spain, Lema-Hincapié observes that in the works cited above, the Argentine essayist places Manrique in a dialogue with a wide range of poetic and philosophical traditions. Some of the names with which Borges associates Manrique are Heraclitus (c. 535-c. 475 BCE), Dante, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882), Robert Browning (1812-1889), Walt Whitman (1819-1892), Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892), Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) and Thomas Wolfe (1900-1938) (222-3). Lema-Hincapié, however, does not consider some of the more interesting philological implications of Borges's writings.

"The Stanzas of Jorge Manrique" consists of a revocation of Menéndez Pelayo's opinions on the *Stanzas* as they are expressed in his *Antología de los poetas líricos castellanos* (*Anthology of Castilian Lyrical Poets*) (1903). Among these opinions is the one that holds that there was no possible way that Manrique was influenced by Arabic poetry. The disagreement about the sources of the poem was born in the nineteenth century and it still generated vigorous debates when Borges published his piece in 1928. To this date, the deliberation is far from being resolved.

The Arabic thesis posits that Manrique's verses expose his reliance on an Arabic eulogy authored by Abu al-Baqa' al-Rundi (d. 1285). An intellectual from Ronda, he lived during the thirteenth century, when Muslims were losing some of their more important and symbolic strongholds in the Peninsula. The aim of his best-known poem, "Lament for the Fall of Seville" (1267), was to obtain military support from the Muslims of north Africa to help combat Christian

[68] "Las coplas acriolladas" can be found in Borges, *El tamaño* 73-9; "Los traductores de las *1001 Noches*" in Borges, "Historia de la eternidad" 397-413; "The Metaphor" in Borges, *This Craft* 19-41 and "La jonction" in Borges, "Atlas" 439.

armies. The Arabic thesis was proposed by the German poet and philologist Adolf Friedrich von Schack (1815-1894), and became well-known among Spanish speakers thanks to the translations of Juan Valera (1824-1905). One of the more enthusiastic supporters of the Arabic thesis was Borges's mentor Cansinos-Asséns, who in his essay "Los orientalismos en nuestra literatura" ("Orientalisms in Our Literature") (1924) resolutely affirms that Manrique's poem is a "transcription" of the elegy of Abu al-Baqa al-Rundi (37).[69] "Orientalisms in Our Literature" is included in an anthology that Borges eloquently praises and recommends in a 1964 tribute to Cansinos-Asséns, *Los temas literarios y su interpretación* (*Literary Themes and Their Interpretation*) (1924) (*Textos recobrados: 1956-1986* 87).

Scholars who oppose the Arabic thesis persist in the belief that absolutely all of Manrique's sources were Latin and Christian. Menéndez Pelayo is a representative example of this way of thinking. He expresses zero doubt in characterizing the Arabic thesis as simply non-credible:

> The fact of the imitation of an artistic Arabic poem by a Castilian poet of the end of the fifteenth century is in itself so improbable, contradicts in such a way all that we know about the development of our lyric, which could only be admitted in the case of supposing that only in the elegy of Abu al-Baqa could Jorge Manrique find the thoughts and forms of expression in which one and another poet coincide. (*Antología* 398)[70]

Menéndez Pelayo insists in that Manrique could find these thoughts and forms of expression in Latin, and therefore Western, texts. Specifically, Manrique got his ideas "from the Scripture, from the Holy Fathers, from the classical moralists and poets, and from Castilian troubadours" (398).[71] These sources perfectly align with his opinion that the *Stanzas* are so Catholic that they

[69] "transcripción" (Cansinos-Asséns, "Los orientalismos" 37).
[70] "El hecho de la imitación de una poesía arábiga artística por un poeta castellano de fin del siglo XV, es en sí mismo tan inverosímil, contradice de tal suerte todo lo que sabemos del desarrollo de nuestra lírica, que sólo podría admitirse en el caso de suponer que sólo en la elegía de Abul-Beka pudo encontrar Jorge Manrique los pensamientos y formas de expresión en que uno y otro poeta coinciden" (Menéndez Pelayo, *Antología* 398).
[71] "de la Escritura, de los Santos Padres, de los moralistas y poetas clásicos, y de los trovadores castellanos" (Menéndez Pelayo, *Antología* 398).

could amount to a "textbook on Christian philosophy" (393).[72] Borges's essay is careful to both cite and ridicule this particular claim. Borges affirms that while in the *Stanzas* one can find "the inevitability of death…one can find neither the absurdity of this act nor the metaphysical bewilderment to which it invites us nor a curious hope in immortality" (*El idioma* 84).[73] In Borges's view, Catholicism thinks of death as absurd. A genuine Catholic poem would thus summon its readers to look forward to eternity. The *Stanzas*, Borges affirms, do not include this invitation; hence, the assertion implies, they are not Catholic. If the poem had been intended as a textbook of Catholic theology it missed one of its most important tenets: the immortality of the soul. As Lema-Hincapié perceptively notes, we can detect Borges's distinctive irony every time he applies the adjective "Christian" to Manrique and Borges's reading "de-Christianizes the poem" (226).[74]

In his often-quoted essay "The Translators of the *Thousand and One Nights*," Borges once again opposes one of the main arguments put forward by rejecters of the Arabic thesis. He cites a couplet included in one of the tales of the *Nights*: "Where is the wight who peopled in the past / Hind-land and Sind; and there the tyran played?" (*Selected Non-Fictions* 99) and says that he thinks of this passage as a "variation of the motifs of Abu al-Baqa al-Rundi and Jorge Manrique" (99).[75] Borges is evoking the lines of "Lament for the Fall of Seville" where we read: "Where are the crowned kings of Yemen and where are their jewel-studded diadems and crowns? / Where are [the buildings] Shaddad raised in Iram and where [the empire] the Sassanians ruled in Persia? / Where is the gold Qarun once possessed; where are `Ad and

[72] "doctrinal de Cristiana filosofía" (Menéndez Pelayo 393).
[73] "En ellas [las *Coplas*] está la forzosidad del morir, pero nunca lo disparatado de ese acto ni el azoramiento metafísico a que nos invita ni un esperanzarse curioso en la inmortalidad" (Borges, *El idioma* 33).
[74] "descristianiza el poema" (Lema-Hincapié 226). Borges's attitude toward Menéndez Pelayo was always confrontational. In an essay published in 1973, Borges sardonically observes that Menéndez Pelayo was someone for whom thinking was almost impossible ("Una versión de Borges," *Textos recobrados 1956-1986* 150).
[75] "variación de los motivos de Abulbeca de Ronda y Jorge Manrique" (Borges, "Historia de la eternidad" 404).

Shaddad and Qahtan?" (al-Baqa' al-Rundi). Borges is also reminding his readers of the lines of Manrique's *Stanzas* where we read "What happened to King Juan? / What to the Infants of Aragon, / What happened to them?" (Manrique, *Obras* 247).[76] Even Menéndez Pelayo acknowledges that the coincidences are astounding, but he thinks of them as merely casual (*Antología* 397). Supporters of the Arabic thesis instead present these coincidences as one more evidence of the dialogue between Romance and Arabic poetic conventions. They explain that the theme of *ubi sunt*, ubiquitous in the Christian Middle Ages, does not only appear in classical sources and in Boethius (480-525 CE), but can also be traced to Arabic poetry of the pre-Islamic period (Metlitzki 105). In his essay on the *Thousand and One Nights*, Borges does not miss the opportunity to remind his readers of the possible Arabic provenance of the *ubi sunt* convention. More critically, Borges surreptitiously relates the *Thousand and One Nights* to one of Spain's more beloved poets.

A Spanish Classic Tale as Part of the *Thousand and One Nights*

Borges also endorses the Arabic thesis as it relates to *Count Lucanor*. He does so in his tale "The Wizard That Was Made to Wait." The yarn is set in medieval Toledo. We are told about a young man who asks a Toledan necromancer to teach him the arts of magic. The wizard answers by offering the potential student a time travel experience.[77] Visions of the future allow the two men to witness how, as years go by, the young man receives one promotion after the other. However, he never uses his newfound power to support the magician, always finding excuses to make the

[76] "¿Qué fizo el rey don Juan? / los infantes de Aragón, / ¿qué se fizieron?" (Manrique, *Obras* 247).
[77] In the preface to *Antología de la literatura fantástica* (*Anthology of Fantasy Literature*) (1940) the tale is described as a time-travel narrative, analogue to, for instance, Herbert George Wells (1866-1946)'s classic *The Time Machine* (1895). Borges co-edited the *Anthology of Fantasy Literature* with Adolfo Bioy Casares (1914-1999) and Silvina Ocampo (1903-1993).

wizard wait. When he becomes the pope, he turns his back on the wizard completely and condemns magic. The visions of the future abruptly end at this point, and the magician refuses to take the young man under his wing. Borges ends the story by stating that it is "[f]rom the *Libro de Patronio* [*Count Lucanor*] by the Infante Don Juan Manuel, who took it in turn from an Arabic volume, *The Forty Mornings and The Forty Nights*" (*A Universal History* 74).[78] The comment amounts to an intervention in a philological dispute that is still far from being resolved.

Borges's narrative is indeed a rewriting of the tale of Don Yllán by Don Juan Manuel, one of Spain's more popular and influential medieval stories (Wacks 414-5). Some scholars, like Menéndez Pelayo, assert that the Arabic *The Forty Mornings and The Forty Nights* had influenced Don Juan Manuel (*Orígenes* 147).[79] As David A. Wacks explains, several critics, including Angel González Palencia, would parrot Menéndez Pelayo's assertion about the source of the tale ("Don Yllán" 417). Wacks and other scholars maintain that Don Juan Manuel's version bears little likeness to the original tale included in *Forty Mornings and Forty Nights* (417). Wacks finds an analogue of the story, instead, in a medieval Hebrew tale. He cites as one of his sources the philologist María Rosa Lida de Malkiel (1910-1962), who Borges knew well. The medievalist Vicente Cantarino, instead, argues that the original tale should be attributed to "a Dominican friar, educated in the theology of that school and the demands of a reasoned dialectics, faithful disciple of then controversial Thomas Aquinas, and dedicated to explaining

[78] "[d]el *Libro de Patronio* del infante don Juan Manuel, que derivó de un libro árabe: *Las cuarenta mañanas y las cuarenta noches*" (Borges, "Historia universal" 342).
[79] Menéndez Pelayo always made sure to distance Spain from Oriental culture by, for instance, repeating that Spain was Latin and Catholic, and that what Arabic culture did was merely to influence on this essentially Latin and Catholic culture (Lacarra 110).

and promulgating his doctrines" (338)—yet more evidence of the fact that the philological debate on the sources of this classic tale is alive and well.[80]

Borges's Arabic thesis acquires a new level of complexity when we note that he relates *Count Lucanor* both with *The Forty Mornings and The Forty Nights* and with the *Thousand and One Nights*. Borges's version of the tale is included in an odd appendix-like section called "Etcetera" which closes *A Universal History of Infamy*.[81] In its original 1935 edition "Etcetera" consisted of a set of five short narratives that were presented as if they were translations from travelogues, theological treatises or Arabic tales from the *Nights*. "The Wizard That Was Made to Wait" was accompanied by "The Chamber of Statues" and by three other tales: "Un teólogo en la muerte" ("A Theologian in Death"), "Historia de los dos que soñaron" ("The Story of the Two Dreamers") and "El espejo de tinta" ("The Mirror of Ink").[82] The current edition of "Etcetera" also includes a short story entitled "Un doble de Mahoma" ("A Double for Muhammad"). The rest of the tales of *A Universal History of Infamy* stand independently. Only these six narratives are grouped together.

The cluster seldom captures the attention of specialists. In the few instances in which it does, the tales are studied separately, as if they were not accompanied by other texts. This methodology has proved fruitful in identifying Borges's sources and in producing interesting

[80] "un fraile dominico, estudiante versado en la teología de su escuela y las exigencias de una dialéctica razonada, discípulo fiel del entonces discutido Tomás de Aquino, dedicado a la promulgación explicada de sus doctrinas" (Cantarino 338).

[81] For a study on the sources of *A Universal History of Infamy* see: "Borges and His Sources: *A Universal History of Infamy*" (Di Giovanni, *The Lesson* 133-64). For a detailed survey on when and where the stories were published see "*Appendix*: A Footnote to Infamy: A Chronology and Guide to Borges's *Universal History of Infamy*" (Di Giovanni 233-49).

[82] In later editions of "Etcetera" these tales would remain, and others would be added. The second enlarged edition of 1954 included three extra pieces. "A Double for Muhammad" tells the tale of a series of Muhammad's doubles. "The Generous Enemy" is the only poem ever included in the collection. It pretends to be a letter from a medieval Irish king to his enemy, simultaneously wishing him happiness in the battle they are going to fight, and informing him very matter-of-factly that he is going to kill him. "On Exactitude in Science" describes an impossible imperial map which reiterates the universe point for point. The current edition of the *Obras completas* (*Complete Works*) incorporates "A Double for Muhammad" but excludes "The Generous Enemy" and "On Exactitude in Science."

readings of isolated aspects of the tales. However, a set of narratives grouped together affords a different reading experience than an anthology of autonomous tales. When we read a cluster we instinctively look for connections between the narratives—not as many as the ones weaving different chapters of a novel but still, significant enough to be considered worthy of attention. Borges does not usually create constellations like this one. This circumstance alone should be enough to at least consider the possibility that there is a reason behind the grouping. One of these connections has to do with the *Nights*. The reader approaches "The Wizard That Was Made to Wait" immediately after reading two tales that are attributed to the *Thousand and One Nights*: "The Chamber of Statues" and the "The Story of the Two Dreamers." "The Chamber of Statues" is set in Iberia, and calls to mind the 711 CE Arab invasion. In this context, the reader has to realize that Don Juan Manuel's medieval story could be seamlessly added to the *Nights*. Even the title of *The Forty Mornings and The Forty Nights* brings to mind the title of *Thousand and One Nights*. The connection between the tale of the wizard and the story in *Nights* is even more powerful in the mind of those readers familiarized with the tales of Scheherazade. As has been observed by Robert Irwin, the motif of unrolling the entire life of a man in less than an hour is also found in "The Tale of the Warlock and the Young Cook of Baghdad" (1698).

Borges's intent to connect his rewriting of Don Juan Manuel's tale with the *Thousand and One Nights* is confirmed thirty years later when, in a 1979 interview, he even decides to skip Don Juan Manuel. This time, he links his version of the story directly with a folkloric Oriental tale:

> BORGES: I heard that story from my father...My father told it to me and called it "The Tale of the Partridges." Now, I do not know how it got to him. I do not think he had read Don Juan Manuel...I imagine it's some Eastern tale... I think my father had read that in some English text…
> …
> BARTHOLOMEW: Ah! You did not read it in Don Juan Manuel?

> BORGES: No, no. My father told me the story of the partridges. (Borges and Carrizo 203-4)[83]

The mention of an Oriental text read in English by his father is clearly meant to evoke the *Thousand and One Nights*. This time, Borges even eliminates Don Juan Manuel from the genealogy of transmission.

Borges also includes a version of "The Wizard That Was Made to Wait" in an anthology of short fantasy narratives he publishes in 1940.[84] The succinct introduction to the story is telling: "Don Juan Manuel, Spanish prince, born in Escalona, in 1282; he dies in Peñafiel, in 1348. He was the nephew of Alfonso the Wise. Man of Latin culture and Islamic scholarship, he is one of the fathers of the Spanish prose" (Borges, Bioy Casares, y Ocampo 207).[85] The comment, though laconic, is powerful: a man who writes in Romance and draws from Islamic erudition stands as nothing less than one of the fathers of Spanish prose. Latin culture, Borges implies, is not incompatible with Islamic scholarship: one single person can actually embody both.

Zajals in *The Book of Good Love*

Unlike what occurs in Borges's analysis of Manrique's *Stanzas* and of Don Juan Manuel's tale, allusions to the *Thousand and One Nights* are absent from Borges's observations on the *Book of Good Love*. Nonetheless, Borges definitively links the unclassifiable text to his "Spain of Islam."

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[83] "BORGES: Ese cuento yo se lo oí a mi padre…Mi padre me contaba ese cuento y lo llamaba 'el cuento de las perdices'. Ahora, yo no sé cómo le había llegado a él. No creo que él hubiera leído a Don Juan Manuel…Me imagino que es algún cuento oriental… Pienso que mi padre había leído eso en algún texto inglés… / … / BARTOLOMEW: ¡Ah! ¿Usted no lo había leído en Don Juan Manuel? / BORGES: No, no. Mi padre me contaba el cuento de las perdices" (Borges and Carrizo 203-4).

[84] The version included in the *Anthology of Fantasy Literature* is slightly different than the one included in *A Universal History of Infamy*. For a study of the differences see: Diz 293-6.

[85] "Don Juan Manuel, príncipe español, nacido en Escalona, en 1282; muerto en Peñafiel, en 1348. Fue sobrino de Alfonso el Sabio. Hombre de cultura latina y de erudición islámica, es uno de los padres de la prosa española" (Borges, Bioy Casares, y Ocampo 207).

In his eighties, Borges wrote a short piece on the *Book of Good Love*. He reminds us that in this fourteenth-century classic of Castilian letters we can find examples of the Arabic-Andalusi poetic form called zajal. Borges also suggests that the Archpriest was inspired by the love poems written by Ovid (43 BCE-c. 17 CE) and by Provençal troubadours ("Biblioteca" 515). The relevance of these seemingly immaterial clarifications becomes evident when they are contextualized in the heated, and ongoing, debates about Ruiz and about courtly love.

The most read and cited twentieth-century volumes on medieval Iberia are Castro's *The Structure of Spanish History* and Sánchez-Albornoz's *Spain: A Historical Enigma*. The first edition of each of these works was first published in Buenos Aires, and both of them devote an extremely long chapter to Ruiz's volume (Gómez Martínez 170-2).The *Book of Good Love* plays a pivotal role in their arguments. If, as Sánchez-Albornoz posits, Ruiz is Christian and Western, then Spain would be too. However, if Ruiz is heavily influenced by Arabic culture, as is argued by Castro, Spain would be forced to break away from its traditional identity narratives.

Castro contends that both Andalusi-Arab zajals and the celebrated Arabic book *Ṭawq al-Ḥamāmah* (*The Ring of the Dove*) (c. 1022) by Ibn Hazm (994-1064) exert a deep influence on Ruiz. Consequently, according to Castro, "the essence of his art...definitely came from the Orient" (*España* 496).[86] In Castro's view, the Archpriest "*essentially* owes nothing to Christian Europe" (*España* 490).[87] Sánchez-Albornoz, meanwhile, refutes Castro's thesis, point by point. That the debate on Ruiz is one of the more controversial ones in Castilian philology is evidenced by the sheer attention that the work obtained during Borges's lifetime. During this time, other prestigious scholars who also took part in the debate—besides Castro and Sánchez-Albornoz—included the already mentioned Lida de Malkiel and García Gómez, and also Joseph E. Gillet

[86] "lo fundamental de su arte…vino sin duda del Oriente" (Castro, *España en su historia* 496).
[87] "*en lo esencial*, nada debe a la Europa cristiana" (Castro, *España en su historia* 490).

(1888-1958), Alois Richard Nykl (1885-1958), Ramón Menéndez Pidal (1869-1968), Otis Howard Green (1895-1878), Dámaso Alonso (1898-1990), Guillermo L. Guitarte (1923-2000), Rafael Lapesa (1908-2001) and Gerald Burney Gybbon-Monypenny (1923-2002). It is unlikely that Borges did not read the work of a few of these scholars—especially when we take into account that references to zajals already occur in poetry he published in the 1940s (as in "Quatrain").[88]

Zajals are a strophic poetic form that originated in al-Andalus. They are "composed entirely in the vernacular Arabic dialect of Andalus, occasionally besprinkled with words or phrases in Hispano-Romance" (Monroe, "Which Came" 38). Its strophic structure represents a departure from the rules of Arabic metrics. The time and circumstances in which zajals emerge is uncertain, with some specialists arguing that they developed soon after the Berber-Arab conquest, and others pinpointing the origin as occurring later.[89] Scholars do agree that its maximum representative was a twelfth-century Cordovan poet named Ibn Quzman (d. 1160). They also concur that he was not the first zajal composer.

In 1914, the Spanish Arabist Julián Ribera (1858-1934) publishes an anthology of Ibn Quzman's zajals. He entitles it *El cancionero de Abencuzmán* (*The Ballads of Ibn Quzman*). The volume is groundbreaking and generates a stir that reverberates throughout Europe, the United States and Latin America. The reason for this is that Ribera claims that zajals influenced Occitan troubadours and insists that Ibn Quzman's ballads hold the key to the mysterious origins of all of medieval European rhyme and of the tradition of courtly love. In 1933, Nykl renews, modernizes and qualifies Ribera's thesis. Ribera had maintained that zajals were a popular form and were

[88] More recently, the topic of zajals has been addressed in Wacks and Monroe. The details of the divergent and often conflictive views on zajals have been summarized in Wacks, *Framing* 157-93 and in Gómez Martínez 170-96.
[89] On the origins of zajals, see: Monroe, "Which Came" and Alvarez.

meant to be sung before crowds. Nykl instead holds that zajals were composed to be performed in private parties hosted by educated, affluent men (269). But overall, he supports Ribera's claim that the zajals provide evidence for Arabic influence on the rest of Europe in the form and content of Provençal poets such as William IX, Duke of Aquitaine (1071-1126) and Marcabru (1130-1150). Nykl was not alone in supporting Ribera's thesis, which was also endorsed by several other prestigious Arabists of the time. In his volume *Cinco poetas musulmanes* (*Five Muslim Poets*) (1945) García Gómez praises Ribera's analysis as "deep, bold" and "admirable" (136).[90]

García Gómez also points out that Ribera's thesis was received with surprise among specialists in Romance languages, who "gleaning words of an ancient Spanish romance discover with shock in these love songs the prototype—in tone, meter, characters and themes—of the poetry of the troubadours of Occitania" (135).[91] Courtly love found its expression in the lyric poems recited and written by eleventh-century troubadours in Aquitaine, Provençe, Champagne and ducal Burgundy. The rules of courtly love were later codified in Andreas Capellanus's treatise *De Amore* (*The Art of Courtly Love*) (1186-1190). The genre played a substantial role in forging Western classics, including Dante's *Commedia*—one of Borges's most frequented books.[92] Courtly love poems are a core element of medieval Western poetry, and disputes over their origin touch upon the very origins of Western identity.[93] Scholars in general agree that Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* (*The Art of Love*) (c. 1 CE) is an antecedent of the tradition of courtly love

[90] "profundo, audaz, admirable" (García Gómez, *Cinco* 136).
[91] "descubren con estupor en estas canciones amorosas un prototipo—en tono, métrica, personajes y temas—de la poesía de los trovadores de Occitania" (García Gómez, *Cinco* 136).
[92] "espigan palabras de un antiquísimo romance español y descubren con estupor en estas canciones amorosas un prototipo —en tono, métrica, personajes y temas— de la poesía de los trovadores de Occitania" (García Gómez, *Cinco* 135).
[93] On the history of the debates about the origins of courtly love see: "The Oldest Issue: Courtly Love" (Menocal, *The Arabic* 71-90).

(Menocal, *The Arabic* 66). Borges's mention of Ovid thus seems to come to the fore as supporting this position. Philologists disagree, however, on whether or not Arabic poetic conventions also exerted an influence on it. Borges is silent about whether zajals might have influenced Provençal poetry. However, his intervention in his short 1986 piece on Ruiz does imply that medieval Provençe was in close contact with al-Andalus—Borges, in other words, perceives the Pyrenees as a permeable contact zone. This simple acknowledgment is the first step in recognizing that the poetry of one place may have influenced the other.

One of the first and most distinguished troubadours was William of Aquitaine, who participated in the First Crusade and in the Reconquest. He married a woman named Philippa (1037-1118), who apparently had some relatives in al-Andalus. As Nykl points out, "[i]t is not unlikely that in her suite there were singers acquainted with the Andalusian ways of composing songs, from which Guillaume may have learned something" (375). He thus had to have been in close contact with Arabic culture, where the tradition strikingly similar to the one of courtly love had existed for centuries. It has been argued, however, that Philippa did not have family connections in Spain, that William of Aquitaine did not know Arabic, and that similar forms of poetry could have developed in an unconnected, parallel way. In this context, Ribera, Nykl and García Gómez's theory about the zajals is adding one more irritant to a dispute that had already been a sensitive topic for centuries.[94]

During Borges's lifetime, as well as now, zajals related both to "French" troubadours and to the *Book of Good Love*. The zajal-like strophes in Ruiz were first noticed during the nineteenth century by von Schack. The Arabic thesis was later endorsed by Menéndez Pidal in *Poesía árabe y poesía europea* (*Arabic Poetry and European Poetry*) (1938), by Castro in *The*

[94] The issue of the relationship between Andalusi poetic forms and Provençal troubadours remains, to this day, a hotly contested one (Menocal, *The Arabic* 71-90).

Structure of Spanish History and by García Gómez in *Five Muslim Poets*. García Gómez turns our attention to the Ibn Quzman's zajal that reads:

> Women, you know, you win by fleeing from them.
> I see none, as they exist in the world, of any worth.
> In my eyes, they are all the same: the young and the old,
> the remote one and the close one, the fat one and the thin one. (131)[95]

According to García Gómez, this zajal evokes "even a bit in its prosody" a well-known episode of the *Book of Good Love*, in which Ruiz praises small women (131). García Gómez avers that "it would not be difficult—only for the sake of a pure poetic game of signaling poetic coincidences—to draw a parallel between Ibn Quzman and the wanderer Juan Ruiz" (131).[96] Borges goes even further, positing zajals as a source of the *Book of Good Love*.

When Borges affirms that in Ruiz's work we can find Provençal poetry, Arab-Andalusian zajals and Ovid, he is adopting an eclectic position on one of the most debated, delicate and significant topics of medievalist philology—one which affected not only "Spain" but also "France" and therefore what is traditionally considered the "West." On one hand, he takes from Von Schack, Ribera, Castro, García Gómez and Nykl that zajals influence the Archpriest. On the other hand, Borges does say that Ovid also influences Ruiz, thus disagreeing with Castro's extreme argument that Ruiz owes absolutely nothing to "Europe."

The most significant implication of Borges's intervention in this philological debate about Ruiz is that due to it, we can certainly affirm that in his world no Castilian medieval canonical work is left untouched by Arabic poetry or tales. Ruiz was inspired by zajals, Manrique's *Stanzas* are in debt to al-Rundi, the *Count Lucanor* tale of the time-traveling wizard

[95] "Las mujeres, como sabes, se gana huyendo de ellas. / No veo que ninguna, mientras las haya en el mundo, valga nada. / A mis ojos, todas son iguales: la joven y la vieja, / la lejana y la próxima, la gorda y la delgada." (García Gómez, *Cinco* 131).
[96] "no sería difícil hacer—sin más alcance que el puro juego de señalar la coincidencia poética—un paralelo de Aben Guzmán con el andariego Juan Ruiz" (García Gómez, *Cinco* 131).

is indebted to an Arabic tale—both Manrique and Don Juan Manuel are in conversation with the *Thousand and One Nights*. As I explain below, Borges also connects Scheherazade's tales with Spain's most renowned book: *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha* (*The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote of La Mancha*) (1605) and its sequel *Segunda parte del ingenioso caballero don Quijote de la Mancha* (*Second Part of The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*) (1615).

An Islamicate and Judaic Quixote

The Arabic stories and poems that inspire Manrique, Lucanor and Ruiz are real and tangible. This is not the case for the only Arabic book that became part of the Spanish classic of all time, the one which supposedly inspires the *Quixote*, which itself purports to be a translation into Spanish of an Arabic text. Borges's essay-story "El acto del libro" ("The Act of the Book") (1981) places this source at center stage when it features an Arabic book that was bought in Toledo, that "orientalists ignore, except in the Spanish version" ("La cifra" 320).[97] The essay "Partial Enchantments in the Quixote" also places Cervantes's classic in dialogue with the Arabic-speaking world when it identifies self-referentiality as a narrative device shared by both Cervantes's masterpiece and the *Thousand and One Nights*. Robin Fiddian and Goytisolo both claim that these Orient-Quixote connections are not incidental. Fiddian observes that "The Act of the Book" challenges "Iberian and Argentine nationalists alike…to accept the idea of a legacy that was hybrid (or 'impure') even before it was transported to the Americas at the dawn of the modern age" (107). Goytisolo interprets Borges's comments on the *Quixote* and the *Nights* as endorsing "multiculturalism" ("Pierre Ménard" 25). Although Borges's approach to the *Quixote*

[97] "los orientalistas ignoran, salvo en la versión castellana" (Borges, "La cifra" 320).

has been the object of much critical attention, Fiddian and Goytisolo are among the few intellectuals who notice Borges's foregrounding of a hybrid, "impure" or multicultural legacy.[98] Fiddian's analysis, however, is limited to one comment regarding the implications of the "The Act of the Book," and Goytisolo only mentions the matter of multiculturalism in passing. In the pages that follow, I will provide additional support to Fiddian's and Goytisolo's theories and I will show that the "impurity" is not limited to Borges's highlighting of Arabic sources; I will also reveal how this notion is demonstrated in his antagonism toward anti-Semitic readings of the Spanish classic.

Borges teaches English Literature in Buenos Aires for twenty years, and draws attention to the Arabic aspects of the *Quixote* during his lectures. When approaching the section of the syllabus related to Romanticism, he chooses to teach a tale by William Wordsworth (1770-1850).[99] The story is told in the first person. "Wordsworth" discusses with a friend the hypothetical catastrophic disappearance of all arts and sciences, then reads the *Quixote* and falls asleep on the beach. He dreams that he is in a huge desert of black sand and that an Arab riding a camel is approaching him. The Arab holds two fantastic objects: one is a shell, which stands for all poetry; the other one is a stone that is also Euclid's *Elements* and which represents all science. These kinds of assimilations, Borges reminds in his lecture, are possible in the world of dreams (*Professor* 113). The Arab urges "Wordsworth" to bury and save the all-important treasures. Borges tells his students how "when the Arab rides off, Wordsworth follows him with his eyes, and sees that the Arab is sometimes an Arab on his camel and sometimes Don Quixote on his

[98] Altamiranda's well-researched article includes a comprehensive account of Borges's allusions to Cervantes. On Cervantes and Borges see also: Sohn. Borges's tale "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" has been the object of much critical attention; see, e.g., "The Novel" (González Echevarría 231-50) and Lie. None of these works, however, delves into Borges's attitude toward the Islamicate and Judaic aspects of the *Quixote*.

[99] The tale is included in *The Prelude or, Growth of a Poet's Mind; An Autobiographical Poem* (1799-1850). On Borges teaching Wordsworth at the Catholic University of Argentina, see: Penna. On Borges teaching Wordsworth at the University of Buenos Aires see *Professor* 113.

Rocinante" (*Professor* 114).[100] Borges points out how "naturally, you can see how the previous circumstances lay the groundwork, especially in the English mind. There is a relationship between Spain and the Arabs, and this rider on his camel, this rider with his spear, is a transformation of Don Quixote" (*Professor* 114).[101] Borges is choosing to teach a particularly revealing passage that foregrounds Spain's "hybrid" origin.

The notion of an "impure" legacy also relates to the *Quixote*'s links to Judaism, a hotly contested topic at the time of Borges's writing. In a 1919 essay entitled "Cervantes y los israelitas españoles" ("Cervantes and the Spanish-Israelis") Cansinos-Asséns notes that Cervantes's works reveal that he was not an anti-Semite and that it is quite possible that he had Jewish friends (*España y los judíos* 125-44).[102] Cansinos-Asséns even claims to be the first to create "this link—Cervantes and the Spanish Israelis" (142).[103] Other Spanish thinkers of Borges's day like Castro and Salvador de Madariaga (1886-1978) also ponder Cervantes's Jewish lineage. As is to be expected, those Catholics who adhered to a fundamentalist version of their religion answer back.

In his best-selling volume *Spain: A Historical Enigma* Sánchez-Albornoz dismisses de Madariaga's thesis as outrageous and staunchly rejects any possible link between anything Jewish and the *Quixote* (702). He even uses the *Quixote* to buttress his anti-Semitic claims. Sánchez-Albornoz dedicates a long chapter of his multi-volume work to support his paradoxical

[100] "cuando el árabe se aleja en el sueño, Wordsworth lo sigue con sus ojos, y ve que el árabe es a veces un árabe en su camello y a veces Don Quijote en su Rocinante" (Borges, *Borges, profesor* 186).
[101] "naturalmente ustedes ven cómo todo esto está preparado por las circunstancias anteriores, por una mente inglesa, ante todo. Hay una relación entre España y los árabes y además ese jinete en su camello, ese jinete con una lanza, viene a ser como una transformación de Don Quijote" (Borges, *Borges, profesor* 185).
[102] The essay is included in *España y los judíos españoles. El retorno del éxodo* (*Spain and the Spanish Jews*. *Return from the Exodus*) (1919). Before writing this essay, Cansinos-Asséns had written several articles on the link between Cervantes and Spanish Jews. He was especially prolific about the topic between 1913 and 1916. The occasion was the anniversary of Cervantes's death.
[103] "este enlace—Cervantes y los israelitas españoles" (142).

claim that Judaism was simultaneously inconsequential and nefarious for Spain. The chapter is peppered with "proverbs" from Cervantes's novel (187, 292). For instance, Sánchez-Albornoz quotes a phrase from the *Quixote* to illustrate how the ever-increasing costs of wars fomented the hatred of Jews. "'The carrier gave it Sancho, Sancho to the lass, the girl to him…'…so the rising costs of the war—the war against the Moors and civil wars—accelerated the speedy race that advancing one after another...needs, demands, abuse, extortion, hatred: of the king, of the knights, of the Jews and of the village people" (187).[104] The interpolation of quotes from the *Quixote* in anti-Semitic arguments implies that, according to Sánchez-Albornoz, the *Quixote* can be read with anti-Semitic lenses. In another chapter, Sánchez-Albornoz even transplants Don Quixote and his squire to medieval Castile and turns them into agents of the Reconquest. In a Romantic interlude to his otherwise scholarly tone, Sánchez-Albornoz imagines a thirteenth-century Castile populated by couples of Quixotic knights and Sanchoesque squires and supposes that their conversations on fantasies of ruling a village could have easily had taken place around this time (55). Sánchez-Albornoz even offers his readers a Romantic image of the Quixote and Sancho, in Castile, with the Cid: "If you climb the cliffs of Gredos, which stand proud between the two plains of the Cid and of Don Quixote…as the evening declines you will see growing larger in the horizon of either Castilian plain the silhouettes of Cervantes's knight and his squire" (55).[105] The Spanish medievalist believes that Alonso Quijano and Sancho "incarnated" Spain

[104] "'Daba el arriero a Sancho, Sancho a la moza, la moza a él…' …así los crecientes gastos de la guerra —de la guerra contra el moro y de las guerras civiles— aceleraban la veloz carrera en que unos tras otros avanzaban…necesidades, exigencias, abusos, extorsiones, odios: del rey, de los caballeros, de los judíos y del pueblo" (Sánchez-Albornoz 187).

[105] "Si trepáis a los riscos de Gredos, que se yerguen orgullosos entre las dos llanuras del Cid y de Don Quijote…al declinar la tarde veréis agigantarse sobre cualquiera de los dos planicies castellanas las siluetas del caballero Labrador y del labriego libre de Cervantes" (Sánchez-Albornoz 55).

(54).[106] As such, they were on the side of those Catholics who were fundamentalist, who reconquered Spain and who expelled supposedly greedy and foreign Jews.

Sánchez-Albornoz is but one representative of a scholar of Borges's day who presents Cervantes and Don Quixote as exemplary Catholics. To some of Cervantes specialists of the twentieth century—including Sánchez-Albornoz—this religious affiliation implied that both Cervantes and his character were anti-Semites or, at the very minimum, of a non-Jewish stock. In his volume *Duelos y quebrantos* (literally, *Grief and Breakings*) (1907), the priest and Cervantes specialist Clemente Cortejón (1842-1911) argues that the mention of *duelos y quebrantos* (usually translated as "scraps") in the first paragraph of the *Quixote* evinces the protagonist's adhesion to Catholic norms on fasting. Because he was "Catholic, as his grandparents," Don Quixote abstained from eating meat on Fridays and ate lightly on Saturdays (8).[107] His essay also clarifies that this sort of attenuated Saturday vigil and fasting was incompatible with the practice of the Jewish Shabbat. As Sánchez-Albornoz, Cortejón assumed and reinforced a distance between Cervantes and Judaism. Other scholars of the day chose to denounce this distance. In his 1925 volume, *El pensamiento de Cervantes* (*The Thought of Cervantes*), Castro argued that Cervantes was an anti-Semite. He later changed his mind about it, and wrote extensively about the tolerance of Cervantes (*Cervantes* 87). Still, his early stance about the issue reflects the prevalent notion of the day: that Cervantes and the Quixote were anti-Semites, or could be used for anti-Semite purposes.

The fictitious reviewer who narrates Borges's story-essay "Pierre Menard, Autor del Quijote" ("Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote") (1939) reminds us of Sánchez-Albornoz and of conservative critics in general. In the first paragraph of his short biography, he explains that

[106] "encarnaron" (Sánchez-Albornoz 54).
[107] "católico, como sus abuelos" (Cortejón y Lucas 9). On the *duelos y quebrantos* controversy see: Nadeau.

the reason that spurs him to write on Menard is to rectify the scandalous shortfalls of a publication of a certain newspaper suspiciously associated with Protestants, Calvinists, Masons and Jews:

> The visible *œuvre* left by this novelist can be easily and briefly enumerated; unpardonable, therefore, are the omissions and additions perpetrated by Mme. Henri Bachelier in a deceitful catalogue that a certain newspaper, whose Protestant leanings are surely no secret, has been so inconsiderate as to inflict upon the newspaper's deplorable readers—few and Calvinists (if not Masonic and circumcised) though they may be. Menard's true friends have greeted the catalogue with alarm, and even with a degree of sadness. (*Collected Fictions* 88)[108]

A journal with Protestant leanings with (few) Calvinists, Masonic and Jewish readers with whom Borges had close ties was, of course, *Sur*, where the tale was originally published.

Sur certainly had a multicultural streak which was reflected, for instance, when eight years after the publication of "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," the magazine printed a special issue on Cervantes. One of the articles was by the French poet and critic André Suarès (1868-1948)—a circumcised man, the biographer of Menard would certainly observe. Suarès claims that Don Quixote fought against prejudices and was a free spirit (13). Another of the articles was by Castro and announced that he had changed his mind about the topic. Cervantes was no longer an anti-Semite. Borges does not appear in this special issue on Cervantes, but the fact that he was a frequent contributor in *Sur* reveals that the journal had no qualms in publishing writers who did not fit the traditional Catholic mold—all those Masons, Jews and Calvinists that the biographer of Menard despises. Borges's grandmother from his father's side was a Calvinist, and four years before "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" was published a pro-Axis Buenos

[108] "La obra visible que ha dejado este novelista es de fácil y breve enumeración. Son, por lo tanto, imperdonables las omisiones y adiciones perpetradas por madame Henri Bachelier en un catálogo falaz que cierto diario cuya tendencia protestante no es un secreto ha tenido la desconsideración de inferir a sus deplorables lectores —si bien estos son pocos y calvinistas, cuando no masones y circuncisos. Los amigos auténticos de Menard han visto con alarma ese catálogo y aun con cierta tristeza" (Borges, "Ficciones" 444).

Aires periodical had pointed to their suspicions about Borges's Judaism. Acting as an inquisitor in the 1930s, *Crisol*, in their edition of January 30, 1934, had said that Borges was of a "mischievously hidden Jewish descent"—which Borges cleverly answered with a short piece titled "Yo, judio" ("I, a Jew") (1934).[109] He says that, as far as he knew, he was not of Jewish descent, but that would have had absolutely no problem linking himself with Jewish origins or culture (Borges, *Textos recobrados: 1931-1955* 79-80). *Crisol* was the typical magazine that someone like Menard's biographer would have been comfortable reading.

Nowadays it is not easy to find outwardly anti-Jewish readings of the *Quixote.* Many Cervantes scholars agree that he was a *cristiano nuevo* (new Christian), most likely of Jewish stock (Wolski 25). According to Goytisolo, however, the conservative impetus to insulate the Quixote from Judaism is still a commanding force in literary studies. He detects a tendency to minimize Cervantes's *converso* (Jewish convert) literary strategies. "Mentioning the Jewish origin of the term 'scraps on Saturday' when referring to the diet of Don Quixote in the first paragraph of the novel is engaging in something inconvenient, that courtesy and good taste advise to silence" ("La historiografía" 34).[110] Borges, however, would not be silenced.

In a 1933 article, Borges assimilates the typical Cervantes specialist of the day with an inquisitor. "Grammar—which is the present Spanish substitute of the Inquisition—has been identified with the *Don Quixote*. I will never know why" (*Textos recobrados: 1931-1955* 56).[111] The same combative spirit can be found eight years later, in a 1941 essay in which Borges uses the adjective "mere grammarian" in order to scorn "the Priest Cortejón, author of *Grief and*

[109] "ascendencia judía maliciosamente ocultada" (Borges, *Textos recobrados: 1931-1955* 79).
[110] "[m]encionar el origen judío de la expresión 'duelos y quebrantos del sábado' al referir la dieta de don Quijote en el primer párrafo de la novela es incurrir en algo inconveniente, que la cortesía o buen gusto aconsejan silenciar" (Goytisolo, "La historiografía" 34).
[111] "La Gramática —que es el presente sucedáneo español de la Inquisición— se ha identificado con el Quijote. Nunca sabré por qué" (Borges, *Textos recobrados: 1931-1955* 56).

Breakings and of *The Catholic Church is the Protector and Best Friend of Agriculture*" ("Sobre los clásicos" 10).[112] Borges's 1946 prologue to Cervantes's *Novelas ejemplares* (*Exemplary Novels*) observes that Cervantes was "tolerant in a century of intolerance," in the century which witnessed "the visible bonfires of the Holy Office" and the "sacking of Cadiz" ("Prólogos con un prólogo de prólogos" 46).[113] Six years later, the essay "Nordau" (1951) reminds readers that the preface to the *Quixote* commends the *Dialogui d'Amore* (*Dialogues of Love*) by Judah Leon Abravanel or, as he is commonly known in the Spanish world, León Hebreo (*Textos recobrados 1931-1955* 237). In 1960 he tells his friend Bioy Casares: "Cervantes was no fanatic: see, *The Spanish English Lady*" (Bioy Casares 249).[114] In a 1967 interview he describes Cervantes as a man "full of tolerance" (Burgin y Borges 121). In a 1978 lecture, Borges reiterates: "Cervantes is a man who lives at the times of the Inquisition, but he is tolerant" ("Borges Oral" 169).[115] Almost every time he mentions the *Quixote,* Borges uses the occasion to remind us that he disagreed with anti-Semitic readings of the classic.

Borges even defends Cervantes against the violent attacks of the French-Argentine critic Paul Groussac (1848-1929). In a 1919 conference Groussac claims that "[i]t takes a fetishist delirium to find a man of 'progress,'—as commonly said—in this 'old Christian,' imbued with the most rancid concerns of race and religion from the hatred of the Moors and heretics to the veneration of the divine right of kings and the natural superiority of aristocrats" (254).[116] Borges

[112] "P. Cortejón, autor de *Duelos y quebrantos* y de *La iglesia católica es la protectora y la mejor amiga de la agricultura.*..mero gramático" (Borges, "Sobre los clásicos" 10).
[113] "tolerante en un siglo de intolerantes" "las visibles hogueras del Santo Oficio" "saqueo de Cádiz" (Borges, "Prólogos con un prólogo de prólogos" 46).
[114] "Cervantes no tenía nada de fanático: véase *La española inglesa*" (Bioy Casares 249).
[115] "Cervantes es un hombre contemporáneo de la Inquisición, pero es tolerante, es un hombre que no tiene ni las virtudes ni los vicios españoles" (Borges, "Borges oral" 169).
[116] "Se necesita padecer el delirio fetichista para descubrir un hombre de 'progreso' —como vulgarmente se dice— en este 'cristiano viejo', imbuido en las más rancias preocupaciones de raza y religión, desde el odio a los moriscos y herejes hasta la veneración del derecho divino de los reyes y de la natural superioridad de los aristócratas…" (Groussac 254).

swiftly answers Groussac's scurrilous attack. Like Groussac, Borges is not shy in his diatribes: "Here shows the dunce Hispanophobia of the author of this book. As a typical Frenchman he believes only in the talent of his countrymen and shamelessly underestimates others" (254).[117] Borges clearly implies that Groussac, not Cervantes, is conveying outdated concepts of race.

Borges's most powerful stance toward the influences on Cervantes is revealed in his essay "Partial Enchantments in the Quixote." He begins by characterizing Castile as the most conventional and ordinary of places: "To the vast and vague geography of the Amadís, [Cervantes] opposes the dusty roads and sordid inns of Castile; it is as if a novelist of our day were to sketch a satirical caricature of, say, gas stations, treating them in a ludicrous way" (*Other Inquisitions* 43).[118] Borges is poking fun at the romanticization of Castile. The essay points to the Spanish writers Unamuno, Azorín (1873-1967) and Manuel Machado (1874-1947) as paradigms of this romanticization (45). These essayists and poets of the Generation of '98 struggled to redefine what it meant to be Spaniard after their homeland lost its imperial position during the nineteenth century. As part of this process, they wrote eulogies and hagiographies of Cervantes and his character Don Quixote in works like *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho* (*The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho*) (1905) by Unamuno and *La ruta de Don Quijote* (*The Route of Don Quixote*) (1905) by Azorín. They also celebrated Castile. The titles of some of their more familiar works show how Castile was central in their endeavors to re-build Spain's identity: "En torno al casticismo" ("About *Casticismo*") (1895) is an often-quoted essay by Unamuno; *Castilla*

[117] "Aquí asoma sus orejas de burro la hispanofobia del autor de este libro. Como buen francés no cree más que en talento de sus paisanos y subestima canallamente a los demás" (Groussac 254).
[118] "A las vastas y vagas geografías del Amadís [Cervantes] opone los polvorientos caminos y los sórdidos mesones de Castilla; imaginemos a un novelista de nuestro tiempo que destacara con sentido paródico las estaciones de aprovisionamiento de nafta" (Borges, "Otras inquisiciones" 45). Borges reiterates the same notion on other occasions. In one of his 1966 lectures he points out that the actual unremarkable landscapes of Castile stand in stark contrast to the ones that Cervantes paints, composed of "conventional landscapes, full of meadows, streams, and copses that belong to an Italian novel" (Borges, *Professor* 15).

(*Castile*) (1912) is the title of Azorin's famed collection of essays, and *Campos de Castilla* (*Fields of Castile*) (1912) is Machado's most renowned anthology of poems. Another instance of this sort of romanticization is the image of a fundamentalist and reconquering Quixote pictured by Sánchez-Albornoz in the passage quoted above. In the mind of the leading scholars of Borges's day, the heart and core of the Spanish soul was located in Castile.

In this context, the fact that Borges refers to Moses of Leon as a "Castilian Rabbi" becomes significant.[119] Borges takes Castile, the supposed heart and core of the most patriotic version of Spain, and tells anti-Semites that, besides lacking any Romantic charm, during the medieval period, it had been home to a Jewish intellectual. He exposes the constructedness of the notions of Castile as the heart and soul of Spain, and as having always adhered to an exclusionary form of Catholicism. Moreover, the article posits that the *Quixote*'s reference to an Arabic text is comparable to the reference to a Palestine manuscript made by Moses of Leon in his magnum opus the *Sefer Ha-Zohar* (*Zohar*), or *Book of Splendor* (44). Borges thus insinuates two connections between the *Zohar* and the *Quixote*: their Castilian provenance and the use of pseudonimity as a rhetorical strategy.[120] The Scottish author Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) in his satirical novel *Sartor Resartus* (1836) also uses this stratagem, the essay observes.

[119] "rabino castellano" (Borges, "Otras inquisiciones" 46).

[120] Scholars have identified many other coincidences between the *Quixote* and the *Zohar*, besides pseudonimity. In her 1966 volume *Don Quichotte, prophète d'Israel* (*Don Quixote, Prophet of Israel*), the French critic Dominique Aubier argues that the *Quixote* includes various veiled references to the *Zohar*. Even the name "Quijote," she claims, could have been inspired by the Aramaic word for truth or certainty *qeshot*, which occurs frequently in the *Zohar* (99). More recently, Nathan Wolski has detected other Kabbalistic resonances in the *Quixote*. Wolski opens his 2009 article on the topic by quoting Borges's allusion to the similarities between the *Zohar* and the *Quixote* in "Partial Enchantments in the *Quixote*." In her 2015 essay "A 21st Century Note on Borges's Kabbalism" Aizenberg observes that Wolski's comparative study on the *Quixote* and the *Zohar* is "inspired" by Borges's literary insight on the *Zohar* and his reading of the *Zohar* as literature (56). In her 1984 volume *The Aleph Weaver* Aizenberg had observed that Borges saw in the *Zohar* a "predecessor" of the *Quixote* and of the *Sartor Resartus* (101); her 2015 article offers a "fresh look at Borges's Kabbalism" (51).

The association of Cervantes with a Jewish intellectual and a foreign (agnostic) Calvinist writer is enough to irritate the conservative sensibilities of the time—those of, for instance, Sánchez-Albornoz, or of the critic-narrator of "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote." Both would have been even more alarmed and saddened when approaching the section of Borges's essay which points to similarities between the *Quixote* and an Islamicate text like the *Thousand and One Nights*. The article observes that the device of the story within the story, which can be found in the *Quixote*, is also present in the *Nights*. Borges compares the *Nights* tale in which Scheherazade tells her own story to the episode in the second volume where Don Quixote talks about the first volume.[121] In his article "Pierre Ménard, auteur du Quichotte" (2000), Goytisolo observes that when Borges brings this analogue to our attention, he "connects the labyrinth and the notion of circularity in the novel to the Eastern tradition" (25).[122] According to Goytisolo:

> he [Borges] suggests the idea of circular time, he outlines his belief in an imperishable and multicultural library, he hoists Cervantes's novel to the rank or paradigm of a modernity and an ecumenism condensed in a cyclical volume whose last page 'will follow suit' in the first one and would give the intoxicating possibility to continue to ad infinitum. The concept of circularity, when present in Borges's work, has an almost mathematical rigor that is found in mystical and esoteric Muslims, among whom the most notable example is the religious imagination of Ibn Arabi. ("Pierre Ménard" 25)[123]

Goytisolo's opinion is a rarity. Borges's *Nights* are usually taken out of context—out of the time and place in which the *Nights* were born, and out of the time and place in which Borges writes his comments.

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[121] On the night-story in which Scheherazade tells her own story, see: Fishburn.

[122] "rattache le labyrinthe et la notion de circularité dans le roman à la tradition orientale" (Goytisolo, "Pierre Ménard" 25).

[123] "il [Borges] suggère l'idée d'un temps circulaire, il expose sa croyance en une bibliothèque impérissable et multiculturelle, il hisse le roman de Cervantes au rang ou au paradigme d'une modernité et d'un œcuménisme condensés dans un volume cyclique dont la dernière page " s'emboîterait " dans la première et conférerait l'enivrante possibilité de le continuer à l'infiniLa notion de circularité, si présente dans l'œuvre de Borges, possède une rigueur quasiment mathématique qu'on retrouve chez les mystiques et ésotéristes musulmans, dont l'exemple le plus remarquable est l'imaginaire religieux de Ibn 'Arabî" (Goytisolo, "Pierre Ménard" 25).

To most scholars what the *Nights* furnished Borges were exclusively theoretical and metaphysical themes, including musings on the ideas of translation, self-referentiality, infinity and labyrinths (Irwin 4849). Brigitte Adriaensen shares this opinion in the sense that, according to her, Borges sees in the *Nights* a source of literary reflections isolated from ideology. In her article "Juan Goytisolo en diálogo con Cervantes y Borges: un ensayo de lectura" ("Juan Goytisolo in Dialogue with Cervantes and Borges: An Essay on Reading") (2009), she argues, contra Goytisolo, that the fact that Borges signals to resemblances in the narrative devices of the *Nights* and the *Quixote* does not mean that the Argentine writer endorses the notion of a "conscious recovery by Cervantes of the Oriental tradition 'peripheral' in the Western cannon" (271).[124] She supports this claim by affirming that Borges opposed Castro's "scientific labor," as shown in his essay "The Alarms of Doctor Américo Castro" (272).[125] In this piece, Borges denounces anti-Semitism and ridicules Castro's polemic defense of the superiority of the Castilian form of Spanish over all other variations. Borges could have disagreed with Castro's passionate defense the normativity of the Castilian Spanish language while simultaneously sharing some of his views on a multicultural medieval Spain—this position on Castro's scholarship is the norm nowadays and there is no reason to believe that Borges would not have shared it. Another of the arguments Adriaensen put forward is that, supposedly, Borges would never affirm, like Goytisolo does, that Cervantes may have been influenced by Oriental literature and specifically by stories which would be later incorporated into the *Nights* (271-2). There is no doubt that, as many scholars have previously noted, to Borges the *Thousand and One Nights* are a symbol of infinity and intertextuality. But, more critically, according to Borges, the *Nights* are

[124] "recuperación consciente por Cervantes de la tradición oriental 'periférica' en el canon occidental" (Adriaensen 271).
[125] "labor científica" (Adriaensen 272).

also a series of specific tales circulating during the Middle Ages in the Arabic-speaking world of which al-Andalus was part. And, like other prestigious Spanish-speaking intellectuals of his day, Borges believed that this Arabic world was in close contact with the Romance world to which Cervantes belonged. Besides connecting the Arabic anthology of tales with Jorge Manrique and with Don Juan Manuel, in one of his early works Borges mentions a Spanish politician and poet (Severiano Lorente) who "seemed to carry with him the idle and generous time of Spain (the broad Muslim time engendered by the *Thousand and One Nights*)" ("Evaristo" 115)—if a twentieth-century Spanish poet could be so influenced by the world of the *Nights*, there is no reason why Cervantes could not have been inspired by it too.[126]

Adriaensen also affirms that Borges never places the *Quixote* in its "ideological" context, and instead prefers to situate the *Quixote* in a strictly literary world (272). Yet, Borges does refer, repeatedly, to the inquisitorial context in which the *Quixote* was written not only in the several interviews and essays quoted above, but also in his tale "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote"—Pierre Menard's magnificent experiment was, precisely, to write the *Quixote* without living in seventeenth-century Spain. Having this particular experiment in mind, and asking oneself how we would read the *Quixote* if it was not written by a seventeenth-century Spanish author, is germane to the understanding of the text, which not only mentions the highlights of Cervantes's biography and of this particular historical era, but also cites, twice, the *Quixote*'s observation on history being the mother of truth. Borges's essay "Partial Enchantments in the Quixote" does seem to decontextualize the *Quixote* when it situates it in the same literary family as the *Zohar*, the *Sartor Resartus*, the *Thousand and One Nights*, the Hindu poem ***Ramayana*** (4 BCE) and William Shakespeare (1564-1616)'s *Hamlet* (c. 1599). These associations make it

[126] "parecía llevar consigo el tiempo ocioso y generoso de España (el ancho tiempo musulmán que engendró el *Libro de las Mil y Una Noches*)" ("Evaristo" 115).

patently clear that just as *hispanista* anti-Semites can associate the *Quixote* with a fundamentalist version of Castilian Catholicism, he can link the Spanish classic to Judaism, Calvinism, Islam and Hinduism.

The combination of the *Quixote* with the *Zohar*, the *Sartor Resartus*, the *Nights*, *Ramayana* and *Hamlet* creates a dizzying pastiche. Pastiches are a typical borgesian device, a staple in his writings.[127] His most renowned pastiche is his evocation of a forged Chinese Encyclopedia that classifies animals according to surprising categories. In this epitome of taxonomic nonsense, animals could be sorted according to whether or not they just broke a vase, whether or not they are sirens, and whether or not they look like flies.[128] The French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) alludes to the hilarious classification in the often-quoted opening paragraph to his volume *Les mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*) (1966):

> This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought—our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and geography—breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other. (xvi)[129]

In Borges's *Quixote* pastiche, one of the narratives that is being called to task, or of the "ordered" surfaces that is being shattered, is the one enshrining the *Quixote* as endorsing a notion

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[127] In *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires*, Aizenberg provides several examples of Borgesian "free-wheeling pastiche[s] of authors, epochs, languages, and philosophies" (108). She mentions how in the story "The Aleph" Borges creates the character of a flatulent Argentine writer who evokes Dante, thus diminishing the Italian's epic stature (107). In another of his stories, Borges somehow manages to turn the prestigious author Kafka into a Babylonian latrine ("La lotería en Babilonia" ["The Lottery in Babylon"]) (1941). The latrine is sacred. According to Aizenberg, Borges even miniaturizes the Bible. He does so, for example, in the story "El evangelio según Marcos" ("The Gospel According to Mark") (1970). The tale transforms Mark's Gospel into the story of the crucifixion of an Argentine medical student. Aizenberg explains that these three pastiches subject Dante, Kafka and the scripture to "reductive techniques" and thus creates "a disorder that calls established rhetoric to task" (107-8).
[128] The allusion to the apocryphal Chinese encyclopedia can be found in "El idioma analítico de John Wilkins" ("The Analytical Language of John Wilkins") (1942).
[129] "Ce livre a son lieu de naissance dans un texte de Borges. Dans le rire qui secoue à sa lecture toutes les familiarités de la pensée—de la nôtre : de celle qui a notre âge et notre géographie—, ébranlant toutes les surfaces ordonnées et tous les plans qui assagissent pour nous le foisonnement des êtres, faisant vaciller et inquiétant pour longtemps notre pratique millénaire du Même et de l'Autre" (Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* 7).

of a fundamentalist Spain. Borges thus counters a fundamentalist version of philology by attacking the heart of its argument: that all Spanish classics are inspired by an exclusionary version of Catholicism "purified" of any Semitic influence, and that they are thus insulated from Judaism and Islam. If the *Quixote* represents, as is usually claimed, the paradigm of the Spanish language, then such language is multi-religious and multi-cultural by nature or, as Grünberg would say, polychromatic.

Another of the ordered surfaces that Borges's pastiche shatters is the separation of real volumes like the *Quixote* from imaginary books, like the Arabic text bought in Toledo. Just as dramaturges invent fictional characters that perform their roles on stage, Cervantes concocts an Arabic Toledo volume. The title of the short narrative "The Act of the Book" confirms this interpretation: the book is acting—performing on stage. Borges concludes his essay "Partial Enchantments in the Quixote" by asking: "Why does it disquiet us to know that Don Quixote is a reader of the *Quixote*, and Hamlet is a spectator of *Hamlet*?" (46). He answers that inversions like this one "suggest that if characters in a story can be readers or spectators, then we, their readers or spectators, can be fictitious" (46).[130] In this unnerving *mise en abîme*, we too are actors, or strings of words, reading strings of words that refer to fictitious strings of words. To Borges, this is the key to the *Quixote*, and any portrayals of Quixote as an anti-Semite knight are absurd.

"The Arabs Living Nowadays Are Not Those Who Raised The Alhambra"

Throughout his life Borges underscores the influence of Arabic poetry and tales in three classic texts of medieval Castilian literature: the *Book of Good Love*, *Count Lucanor* and Manrique's

[130] "¿Por qué nos inquieta que Don Quijote sea lector del *Quijote*, y Hamlet, espectador de *Hamlet*?…tales inversiones sugieren que si los caracteres de una ficción pueden ser lectores o espectadores, nosotros, sus lectores o espectadores, podemos ser ficticios" (Borges, "Otras inquisiciones" 47).

Stanzas on the Death of His Father. Borges also hints at the influence that Arabic and Hebrew culture might have had on Cervantes. Bearing this in mind, we could read the line featuring the "Dark Night of the Soul" of the poem "Spain" in a new light. As mentioned earlier, this is an evident allusion to Saint John of the Cross, but it could also be an evocation of the Arabic-Andalusi poetry that uses this same evocative imagery. Borges conjures up the poetic metaphor immediately after the line introducing his medieval "Spain of Islam." This proximity is not incidental. Nor is it incidental that the poem fails to mention Saint John of the Cross and chooses instead to feature this specific metaphor which has been associated with mystical Andalusi sages. One of them was the Sufi Theologian Ibn Abbad al-Rundi (1333-1394). A fourteenth-century mystic from Ronda, he commentated the works of an influential North-African Sufi scholar named Abu al-Hasan ash-Shadhili (1196-1258). Ibn Abbad al-Rundi teaches his disciples that it was Abu al-Hasan ash-Shadhili who thought of the metaphor of the night to illustrate the fact that God teaches you in moments of anguish and pain, in nights of desperation and darkness (Asín Palacios, "Un precursor" 14, 56). Based on this and other coincidences, Asín suggests that Ibn Abbad al-Rundi was a precursor of Saint John of the Cross. He does so in an article published in 1933, which was later reprinted in his well-known anthology of essays *Huellas del Islam* (*Islamic Imprints*) (1941). Borges mentions this specific book in his essay "Pascal," published in 1947. The Argentine writer, and at least some of his readers, were familiar with Asín's polemic theory. To them, the image of a dark night of the soul conjured immediately after the mention of "Spain of Islam" evokes the influence exerted by Arabic poetry and mysticism on the Castilian-speaking world.

A last point of clarification is in order with regard to the implications of endorsing the Arabic thesis. Highlighting the Mediterranean or Islamicate aspects of medieval society does not

imply, by itself, sanctioning the sometimes unrealistic and rosy *convivencia* pictured by Castro. Ever since Castro proposed this model, historians and literary scholars have proposed alternative, more nuanced, ways of understanding the coexistence of Muslims, Jews and Christians in Medieval Iberia. Recently, the historian Brian Catlos has proposed to take our focus off religion, and instead turn our attention to other factors, including social class, occupation, hometown and gender.[131] These factors shaped what medieval peoples thought of being more convenient for them—they acted based on *conveniencia* (convenience). A third model, proposed by David A. Wacks, is that of *contravivencia*. Wacks suggests us to visualize an "agonistic yet productive symbiotic relationship in which each participant is a *sine qua non* in the construction of the other's identity and cultural formation" (*Framing* 5). The *contravivencia* model allows us to endorse the Arabic thesis without glossing over the violence that often times characterized the agonistic relationship between Muslims, Jews and Christians during the Middle Ages.

More importantly, endorsing the Arabic thesis does not imply that old stereotypes are absent. We can celebrate medieval Mediterranean culture while simultaneously fossilizing it in the past. At the time that Borges writes, this sort of fossilization is ubiquitous. Not surprisingly, the tendency to freeze Arabic culture in an insulated past is especially marked among scholars who are of the opinion that Arabic culture did not leave a deep imprint in Spain. In 1922, in his *España invertebrada* (*Invertebrate Spain*), Spain's most celebrated twentieth-century philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) relegates the extended Arab presence in Spain to a laconic footnote: "neither the Arabs are an essential ingredient in the genesis of our nationality, nor their domination explains the weakness of Peninsular feudalism" (149).[132] Thirty years later,

[131] See: Catlos, "Contexto."
[132] "ni los árabes constituyen un ingrediente esencial en la génesis de nuestra nacionalidad, ni su dominación explica la debilidad del feudalismo Peninsular" (Ortega y Gasset, *España invertebrada* 149).

Ortega y Gasset makes his anti-Muslim prejudices more explicit when he writes a preface to a 1952 translation into Spanish of *The Ring of the Dove*. He praises *The Ring of the Dove*, but then distances himself—and Spain—from Islamicate culture. He repeats the typical stereotype: after the Middle Ages, Islamic culture fell into a sleep from which it has not yet awakened. After the thirteenth century, he claims, the Arab civilization "dries and petrifies by dint of the Koran and the deserts" (xv).[133] A footnote insists: "the Koran parches souls and dries people out" (xv).[134] Readers can thus approach the reading of the translation into Spanish of Ibn Hazm's volume without fearing a substantial shift of identity paradigms. Even though Arabic poetry was written and recited in their lands, for centuries, the "Arabs" had fallen asleep, while the "Spaniards" had advanced to found a purportedly magnificent empire.

Unlike Ortega y Gasset, García Gómez made substantial contributions to the scholarly study of the Arabic elements of the Iberian Middle Ages, and even to the diffusion of Arabic-Andalusi poetry among a wider audience. He was convinced that Arabic poetry exerted a tangible and lasting influence on medieval poetry written in Romance languages, including Spanish and Italian. His opinion as to this aspect of European literary history could not be farther away from that of Ortega y Gasset. Yet, as his Spanish colleague, he also distances Spain from Arabic poetry. In the preface to his best-selling *Poems from Arab Andalusia*, he exclaims: "It is such a powerful force, especially among Arabs, that of archaism!" ("Prólogo" 21).[135] Because of this supposedly essential archaism, after the Middle Ages, "Arabic poetry...would languish—dull, limp, tired—in a gradual decline" (García Gómez, "Prólogo" 22).[136] I have already

[133] "queda reseca y petrificada a fuerza del Corán y de desiertos" (Ortega y Gasset, "Prólogo" xv).
[134] "el Corán apergamina las almas y reseca a un pueblo" (Ortega y Gasset, "Prólogo" xv).
[135] "¡Fuerza poderosa, sobre todo entre los árabes, la del arcaísmo!" (García Gómez, "Prólogo" 21).
[136] "la poesía árabe…irá languideciendo —monótona, lacia, cansada— en una paulatina decadencia" (García Gómez, "Prólogo" 22).

mentioned that, according to García Gómez, the Cordovan civilization "was the same civilization of the Baghdad of *The Thousand and One Nights*" but I did not mention that immediately after saying that he qualifies by clarifying: "but devoid of the dark monstrosity that the East always holds for us [Spaniards]; it was westernized by the thin rural air of Sierra Morena" (García Gómez, "Prólogo" 28).[137] According to García Gómez, Spaniards are not only non-Orientals; Orientals, to Spaniards, are the definition of the Other. García Gómez also thinks that the loss of Spanish ideals coincides with a particular period of history in which Jewish intellectuals were especially powerful. During the eleventh century, "the Spanish ideal…is lost" ("Prólogo" 31).[138] "[N]oble Córdoba languishes and Berber princes…deliver themselves into the hands of the Jews" ("Prólogo" 32).[139] It is hard not to infer that it is not incidental that the "Spanish ideal" is lost precisely during the period in time in which Jews were linked to power. García Gómez first distances Spaniards from the Muslims of Baghdad and then from Jews. Once again, Spanish-speaking readers, even those who adhere to a fundamentalist version of Catholicism, can read the Arabic poems without fear of suffering any identity crisis. Even though the poems are written and recited in their own territory, they (Spaniards) are not them (Orientals, Muslims, Jews). The traditional fear of Islam and of Judaism promoted by exclusionary forms of Catholicism is still thriving.

The fossilization stereotype allows Spaniards to distance themselves from the Islamic(ate) aspects of medieval culture. They circumscribe it to an insulated space and time. "Arabs" become a layer of their underground, subsequently covered by other layers. Spanish-

[137] "Era la misma civilización de la Bagdad de *Las mil y una noches*, pero desprovista de todo lo oscuramente monstruoso que para nosotros tiene siempre el Oriente; occidentalizada por el aire sutil y campero de Sierra Morena" (García Gómez, "Prólogo" 28).
[138] "[s]e pierde…el ideal español" (García Gómez, "Prólogo" 31).
[139] "[L]a noble Córdoba languidece y los príncipes bereberes…se entregan en manos de los judíos" (García Gómez, "Prólogo" 32).

speaking intellectuals can therefore practice a form of archeological linguistics whereby they celebrate al-Andalus, unearth and collect pieces of "Arab" culture and even display representative objects in literal and metaphorical museums. They can do all this as long as everyone is on the same page and agrees that Spaniards are not Orientals and that the Orient is a thing of the past.

Borges never actually affirms something as crude as the idea that Muslim culture had fallen asleep. There is some truth, however, to what Ian Almond claims in the sense that Borges's Islamic scholarly references tend to be medieval and that Borges's Islam "hardly ever ventures beyond the fifteenth century" (449). This fact alone is not relevant. Most of Borges's scholarly references to the literature of Scandinavia are also medieval and when he teaches English literature he dedicates a disproportionate number of classes to the Middle Ages—yet no one would dare to say that he believed that Scandinavia or England were stuck in the Middle Ages and could not advance into modernity. More critically, Borges does write tales set in the twentieth century in which Muslim characters are a part of modernity. In one of these stories, set in India, Muslim characters participate in a successful insurrection against an oppressive British judge.

In a sense, however, Borges does relegate Arab culture to the past. Borges's friend Bioy Casares recorded his conversations with Borges in a diary. These were meant to be private tête-à-têtes, and in them Borges is seen making statements that he would not make in interviews, essays or stories. This was supposed to be his private persona, sheltered from the eyes of the public. In public, he defends the Israeli cause in the Arab-Israeli war without belittling Arab culture. In private, Borges attacks those who defend the Arab side of the war in these terms: "They are fascinated by baseness…If there was a war between Swiss and Lapps they would all be

supporters of the Lapps…The Arabs living nowadays are not those who raised the Alhambra" (Bioy Casares 480).[140] The assumption that a "Lapps" cause would always be in the wrong side of the spectrum is troubling enough. So is the implication of the last sentence. Arabs of the day were not those who raised the Alhambra. Affirming this fact would be as absurd as saying that the English today are the same as those who built Gothic cathedrals in the fourteenth century. It would also be absurd to claim that, because Borges admired Arabic medieval culture, he had to support everything that anyone speaking Arabic did centuries later. But the comment also shows that the Arab culture that Borges is willing to celebrate is, in general, the medieval one and that this does not translate so easily onto the present, or even to locations distant from al-Andalus. In this limited sense, I agree with Almond's claim that in Borges's tales "Islam, far from a living contemporary faith, becomes a historically isolated pool of alternative metaphors, frozen in the past without any allowance made for advancement in modernity" (449). On the one hand, as shown in the first Chapter, Borges does incorporate Arabic poetic conventions in his writings, thus emphasizing that a live portion of Islamicate culture survives and thrives in his native language. He also makes certain to remind his readers that Spanish classics borrowed from Arabic poems and tales. In addition, Borges mingles "Islamic" elements with "Spanish" ones. He does so, for instance, in "Averroes's Search," when the siesta is mentioned alongside the Arabic language. He is consequently challenging the distancing between Arabs and Spaniards that scholars like Ortega y Gasset and García Gómez—not to mention Sánchez-Albornoz—are so keen on reinforcing. I do not think that Borges can be easily subsumed under a traditional Catholic fear of Islam, as suggested by Almond. Yet, the clarification that the Arabs of today are not those who constructed the Alhambra leaves us with doubts as to Borges's ability to

[140] "Los fascina la bajeza...Si hubiera una guerra entre suizos y lapones todos serían partidarios de los lapones...Los árabes de hoy no son los que levantaron la Alhambra" (Bioy Casares 480).

completely overcome some of the more insidious stereotypes of his day. It also reveals that to Borges the connections between “Arabs” and the Spanish Middle Ages were so powerful that he could not think of one without the other.

Chapter 3: How "Western" was the Rest of Medieval Europe?

In the previous chapter I examined different essays in which Borges writes about how Arabic poems and tales inspired three Spanish classic works: the *Stanzas on the Death of His Father*, *Count Lucanor* and the *Book of Good Love*. To Borges, Mediterranean and Peninsular boundaries were porous enough to enable the influence of Arabic in early Castilian. The question remains, however: was al-Andalus and Arabic culture only in contact with Castilian culture and completely isolated from French, Italian and English culture? For centuries, numerous historians, literary scholars and philologists have been giving a negative response to this query: no, al-Andalus was not simply cut off from the rest of the European continent.

During the Middle Ages the Pyrenees, just as the Mediterranean, functioned not only as a barrier but also as a contact zone, allowing for political, commercial and intellectual connections. Some philologists claim that even before their eighteenth-century "translation," Arabic tales from what would become the *Thousand and One Nights* were circulating not only in the southern Mediterranean and in al-Andalus, but had crossed the Pyrenees and the Mediterranean to France, and then traveled from France to the rest of the continent and to England (Amer 371; Irwin 1739; Tuczay 272). It is a well-known fact that poets and scholars from England like Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400) frequently traveled to France and Italy, and it is generally accepted that the contacts between the Arabic world, France and Italy were plentiful at the time. Some English scholars traveled directly to Spain, and back to England. It has been argued, in fact, that the notion of frametales such as *Count Lucanor* but also the *Canterbury Tales* originated in Hindu, Persian and Arabic cultures, and was transmitted to Don Juan Manuel and Chaucer via al-Andalus (Wacks, *Framing* 105). In other words, many argue that during what we now call the Middle Ages, what we now call the European continent was composed of a series of different contact

zones in which languages and cultures overlapped with each other. This chapter concentrates on how several of Borges's writings expose that the link between the Arab and the European worlds was not limited to the territory we now call Spain, but also extended to Italy, France and England.

One of the texts I will analyze is an essay in which Borges mentions the influence that Arabic philosophy had on the highly influential seventeenth-century French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623-1662). The bulk of the chapter, however, does not examine essays, and instead surveys several of Borges's tales and poems that expose the "influence" that Arabic stories, poems and scholarly writings exerted in three different European canonical poets: Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533), Dante and Chaucer. I am enclosing the word "influence" in quotation marks because the Borges texts we will explore throughout this chapter do not actually claim and coherently argue that this specific Arabic poem influenced this specific Italian or English poet. They do not evoke in us readers an image of a straightforward linear influence. Rather, Borges's tales and poems insinuate or imply this influence by leaving us with the impression of poets and prophets who are reincarnated centuries later in a faraway land, of palimpsests, of streams of poetic conventions that merge onto other streams, of oceans and rivers of memories that shape identity and weave into someone else's memory, shaping their identity.

The word "influence" thus reveals itself to be limited. A recent scholarly trend in the field of philology pays close attention to the different metaphors utilized to illustrate the often unpredictable paths taken by poetic conventions, tropes and plots when they travel across time and space. In her volume *European Modernity and the Arab Mediterranean: Toward a New Philology and a Counter-Orientalism*, Mallette examines different instances of contact between Arabic and Romance languages and literatures. She dedicates one chapter to, for example, the

influence that Islamic theology might have had on Dante. Mallette aptly points out that philological readings of the medieval Mediterranean expose the shortcomings of the notion of texts influencing each other. These limitations have inspired her and other scholars to seek "more complex narrative techniques for describing what happens to languages and literatures in contact zones" (130). As mentioned in the Introduction, Mallette suggests that one of these complex narrative techniques is metempsychosis, or the "incorporeal migration of ideas from one human mind to another" (36). I also mentioned earlier that Mallette reports that this technique was used by a nineteenth-century scholar when he commented that the "spirit" of an Egyptian thirteenth-century Muslim poet reappeared a century later in Petrarch.

Through the use of different narrative techniques, Borges can illustrate influence in tales and poems rather than doing so through traditional scholarly channels—instead of claiming that a certain poet influenced another poet and supporting this claim with arguments, he can write a story suggesting that an incorporeal idea about courtly love was transported from the mind of one poet to another. As I will show, this is precisely what he does. Inspired by Mallette's highlighting of the fact that different narrative techniques can be utilized to describe and analyze influence, in this chapter I will show how in some of his stories Borges insinuates that metempsychosis took place in order to indicate an occurrence of influence. I will also bring to light the several other narrative techniques that Borges utilizes in order to better illustrate contacts between Arabic and Romance languages and literatures. Many Borges's commentators have characterized Borges's tales and poems as philosophical (Bossart 20; Johnson 1; Bosteels 37). I will provide some examples to show that many of them are also philological.

The search for fresh narrative techniques to portray different instances of influence along with the exposure of the porousness of national and Mediterranean boundaries are part of

Mallette's "New Philology." New Philology is aligned with what I, inspired by Grünberg, have been calling "polychromatic languages." New Philology counters the patriotic philology that is especially powerful among those philologists who adhere to this nationalistic aspect of the Romantic paradigm. Because Romantic medievalism sees itself as revealing the mythical birth of each nation, it insulates each "national" language from anything foreign. In France "national medievalism meant primarily denials of Germanic influences" (Warren, "Medievalism" 292). In Spain it meant denials of French influences. Spain's famed philologist Menéndez Pidal, for example, would rebuff any possible influence of French in the *Cid*. This Spanish form of patriotic medievalism naturalizes the Pyrenees not as a contact zone but as an impermeable border.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the most dreaded influences, however, were not German or French. The ones that caused more clashes and anxiety were those challenging the notion of an exclusively Western and most definitively non-Semitic Europe. Grünberg, one of Borges's favorite poets, was one of the many intellectuals of the twentieth century who sensed this resistance. In 1937, he published an article suggestively entitled "Hebraísmos y cryptohebraímos en el romance Peninsular y americano" ("Hebraisms and Cryptohebraisms in Peninsular and American Romance Language"). He argues that "the Romance language, both the Peninsular and the American one, has...a good number of Hebraisms, some of which are known or pseudo-known, while many others are completely unknown, constituting actual cryptohebraisms" (118).[141] Grünberg notes that three different volumes on Spanish philology published at the beginning of the twentieth century fail to

[141] "[e]l romance, tanto Peninsular como americano, contiene…un buen número de hebraísmos, algunos de los cuales son conocidos o pseudoconocidos, en tanto que muchos otros son desconocidos en absoluto, constituyendo verdaderos criptohebraísmos" (Grünberg, "Hebraísmos" 118).

acknowledge the allegedly Hebraic origin of certain Spanish words.[142] For example, he claims that the Spanish words for witch (*bruja*) and for kid (*niño*) are derived, respectively, from the Hebrew words *berajá* and *nin* (114, 117). Grünberg senses that an effort to erase Judaism from the history of the Spanish language is afoot. He also sees this endeavor as an unacknowledged remnant of the inquisitorial spirit—hence his coinage of the neologism "cryptohebraism" ringing of "crypto-Judaism."

As Borges and many of his readers knew well, the possible influence of Arabic was an even greater philological concern. The Arabic thesis has its origins with the sixteenth-century academic Giammaria Barbieri (1519-1574), who wrote *Dell'origine della poesia rimata* (*On the Origins of Rhymed Poetry*). He argued that "European" rhyme was inherited from Arabic letters, and the eighteenth-century Spaniard Juan Andrés (1740-1817) echoed his statements. According to Menocal, Andrés's *Dell'origine, progresso e stato attuale d'ogni letteratura* (*On the Origins, Progress and Present State of All Literature*) (1782) "was at least partially motivated by the shock and consternation that his Italian hosts, and other Europeans, were unaware of how deeply indebted they were to the Spanish Arabic tradition" (80). It has been argued that by the middle of the nineteenth century "the notion that the origins of troubadour poems and courtly love lay in al-Andalus was a conventional maxim of criticism" (Menocal, *The Arabic Role* 78-80). The Arabic thesis gained more supporters in the twentieth century. In 1919 Asín—a writer frequently quoted by Borges—published a book that would become a milestone in the philological world: *Escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia* (*Muslim Eschatology in the Divine Comedy*).

[142] Grünberg mentions *Estudio elemental de la gramática histórica de la lengua castellana* (*Elementary Study of the Historical Grammar of the Castilian Language*) (1902) by José Alemany Bolufer (1866-1934), *Manual de gramática histórica española* (*Handbook of Spanish Historical Grammar*) (1904) by Menéndez Pidal and *Elementos de gramática histórica castellana* (*Elements of Castilian Historical Grammar*) (1914) by Vicente García de Diego (1878-1978).

Asín argued that Dante drew on Arabic scholarship and lore to write his *Commedia*. Interestingly, claims of possible Arabic influences also threatened to put into question the "purity" of works that were produced farther away from the Mediterranean. Many philologists argue for the Arabic origins of the "Squire's Tale," a story set in the Orient that Chaucer includes in his *Canterbury Tales* (Irwin 1739).

The Arabic thesis was met with a great deal of skepticism and even shock among philologists who had been accustomed to a more traditional approach. Stefano Arteaga (1747-1799)'s *Della influenza degli Arabi sulla poesia moderna* (*On the Influence of the Arabs on Modern Poetry*) (1791) firmly rejected the possibility of Arabic poets influencing their Romance counterparts. Similarly, in a work published in 1888, the Spanish scholar Francisco Javier Simonet (1829-1897) would passionately argue against the Arabic thesis. According to him, "[m]edieval Iberian Christians did not learn from their Arab conquerors…but rather taught the glories of early medieval Christian culture to the unlettered Arabs" (Mallette 60). The renowned nineteenth-century philologist and legal scholar Andrés Bello (1781-1865), hailing from Chile, contended that "Arabic culture was always an exotic plant" in the Peninsula (Bello 19:167 qtd. in Altschul, *Geographies* 199).[143] Therefore, "nothing Arabic could extend roots in Spain: religion, laws, the genius of language, of art and of literature took nothing or little from the Mohammedan conquerors" (Bello 19:167-8 qtd. in Altschul, *Geographies* 199).[144] As Michelle Warren explains, the medievalist Joseph Bédier (1864-1938) echoed Bello when he denied "that Arabic culture had any influence on the poem [the *Roland*] and located the poem's genesis in French incursions into Muslim Iberia that reopened the pilgrimage route to Compostela" (291). Dante

[143] "la cultura arábiga fue siempre una planta exótica" (Bello 19:167-68 qtd. in Altschul, *Geographies* 199).
[144] "nada arábigo pudo echar raíz en España: la religión, las leyes, el genio del idioma, el de las artes, el de la literatura, poco o nada tomaron de los conquistadores mahometanos" (Bello 19:167-8 qtd. in Altschul, *Geographies* 199).

scholars reacted with disbelief to the suggestion that the *Commedia*, this most cherished Christian poem, could have had anything to do with Islam. This was especially the case among Italian intellectuals who, as Mallette observes, "preferred to see their own modernity as a reinvention of the Roman miracle" (59). Other prestigious scholars who rebuffed the Arabic thesis include Madame de Staël (1766-1817), François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848) and Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829).[145]

Because of this fear of an Arabic influence, one of the boundaries that still causes more conflict and concern is the one separating al-Andalus from the rest of Europe. The aphorism usually attributed to Alexander Dumas (1802-1870) "Africa starts at the Pyrenees" represents a sturdy exposition of the sentiment that dominated the old type of philology that Mallette's New Philology counters. The secretary of Napoleon and Archbishop of Mechelen Dominique Dufour de Pradt (1759-1837) succinctly expressed the attitude buttressing the slogan. In his *Mémoires historiques sur la révolution d'Espagne* (*Historic Memories about the Spanish Revolution*) (1816) he writes:

> It is an error of geography to have assigned Spain to Europe; it belongs to Africa: blood, manners, language, their way of life and of making war; in Spain everything is African. The two nations have been mixed up for too long—the Carthaginians who came from Africa to Spain, the Vandals who left Spain for Africa, the Moors who stayed in Spain for 700 years—for such a long cohabitation not to have confused the race and customs of the two countries. If the Spaniard were Mohammedan, he would be completely African; it is [the Catholic] religion that has kept it in Europe. (Pradt 68)[146]

[145] On the rejection of the Arab thesis by Madame de Staël, Chateubriand and Schlegel see Menocal 80-2.
[146] "C'est une erreur de la géographie que d'avoir attribué l'Espagne à l'Europe; elle appartient à l'Afrique: sang, mœurs, langage, manière de vivre et de combattre; en Espagne tout est africain. Les deux nations ont été mêlées trop longtems, les Carthaginois venus d'Afrique en Espagne, les Vandales passés d'Espagne en Afrique, les Maures séjournant eu Espagne pendant 700 ans, pour qu'une aussi longue cohabitation, pour que ces tranfusions de peuples et de coutumes n'aient pas confondu ensemble les races et les mœurs des deux contrées. Si l'Espagnol était Mahométan, il serait un Africain complet; c'est la religion qui l'a conservé à l'Europe" (Pradt 68).

Dumas and Pradt make it patently clear that the boundary separating Africa from Europe—the East from the West—is not only marked by the Mediterranean, but also by the Pyrenees. Many French philologists of the time were also eager to reinforce this boundary. Many of them would have probably been scandalized by the insinuation that Arabic poetry influenced the Castilian (Latin, Catholic) one. At the same time this idea would not have been as shocking as the suggestion that anything Islamicate ever had contact with anything French.

If we concentrate on the Arabic and Islamicate aspects of Spain but completely overlook those of France or other European countries, then we would still be reinforcing the East-West boundary; we would be simply moving it to the Pyrenees—just like Dumas and Pradt did. Menocal warns us about this possibility in an article tellingly entitled "And How 'Western' was the Rest of Medieval Europe" (1988) in which she challenges two assumptions that are often made about the Middle Ages. The first is that there is an actual entity centered in "Europe" that can be meaningfully called the "West." The second supposition is "that whatever Spain was must be seen, understood and analyzed, for better or worse, in terms of that presumed cultural entity [Europe, the West], that being our yard stick, inescapably, for whether and how Spain is belated or not, different or not, unique or not. This second point is perhaps the only one on which Castro and Sánchez-Albornoz…would agree with each other" (184). Menocal poses Ernst Curtius (1886-1956)'s *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter* (*European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*) (1953) as a paradigmatic example of these assumptions.

Curtius's interest in literatures from countries other than Germany—most notably France—earned him the condemnation of many of his German compatriots at the time, who did not appreciate his engagement with the "enemy's literature." Philologists and historians often praise this relative internationalism and the sometimes heroic stance he took against parochial

forms of German nationalism and Nazism (Calin 218-27; Zakai 51-8; Aizenberg, *On the Edge* 134). Notwithstanding the fact that some of his position against strident variations of German patriotism are certainly laudable, his attitude toward Medieval Iberia is questionable. Curtius was willing, to a certain extent, to expose the porousness of some European borders, but not of all of them—the limit between al-Andalus and "Europe" remained firmly in its place. Curtius's magnum opus enshrines Aquinas as the prototype of a genuine European who belongs to core of the West and includes a short chapter entitled "Spain's Cultural 'Belatedness'".[147] Menocal comments that Curtius assumes the existence of two types of Aristotelianism. One is genuine, and predictably coincides with the "European" one. The other one, the heretical one, has passed through the filter of Arabic and Jewish thinkers of twelfth-century Spain. Menocal exposes Curtius's assumption that Europe is synonymous with Thomism, Humanism and the Italian Renaissance, which implies that Europe is not "contaminated" by Spain. Curtius avoids mentioning the influence that philosophers like Averroes, according to Asín, exerted on Aquinas. Menocal here goes to the heart or the matter, as does Borges when he writes about, for instance, a 1942 edition of Pascal's oeuvre. His essay "Pascal" is dedicated to this edition made by Zacharie Tourneur, that shares quite a few similarities with *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages.*[148] Both are written during the mid-twentieth century, solidly place France in the West, and assume an impenetrable barrier between the East and the West.

[147] Menocal quotes a telling extract from this chapter of *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*: "Although he wrote in the fifteenth century, Alfonso de la Torre is almost untouched by both the Latin Scholasticism of the thirteenth century and by genuine Aristotelianism. What he gives to the Spain of the fifteenth century is an eclectic rehandling of learning that goes back partly to late Antiquity and the pre-Middle Ages (Martianus Capella and Isidore), partly to the Latin Renaissance of the twelfth-century France (Alan), partly to the heretical Aristotelianism of the Jewish and Arabic thinkers of twelfth-century Spain. In other words: An author who writes in 1440 and is published in 1480 can find readers in Spain…although he practically ignores all that European literature, science and philosophy have produced since 1200—not only Thomism, that is, but also Humanism and the Italian Renaissance" (Curtius 542-3).

[148] Borges reviews *Pensées de Blaise Pascal : edition paléographique des manuscrits originaux conservés à la Bibliothèque Nationale enrichie de nombreuses leçons inédites et présentée dans le classement primitif /avec une*

Pascal was a French mathematician, inventor, and theologian. Like most highly-influential minds, he became many different things to many different people:

> Voltaire's Pascal—the scientific genius and Enlightenment wit turned sour religious fanatic—is the reverse image of the Pascal adored by the Port-Royal community—the gentle saint who abandoned frivolous worldly pursuits to take up the Cross. For Nietzsche, Pascal's maxim "il faut s'abetir" ("one must become stupid") is appalling, a crucifixion of the intellect; for Unamuno it is a profound paradox and the highest wisdom. Valéry's Pascal is a sententious and badgering preacher, oblivious to the beauty of nature; the Pascal of Sainte-Beuve is an "athlete, martyr, and hero of the invisible moral world." What Gilberte Perier refers to as her brother's "second conversion," Bertrand Russell regards as an act of "philosophical suicide." And so on. In short, Pascal's writings, and especially the *Pensées*, have served less as a window into the author's soul than as a kind of mirror or prism reflecting the different outlooks and opinions of his readers. (Simpson, N.p.)

Borges's Pascal reveals Borges's uneasiness with Torneur's Pascal, who epitomized France and Catholicism. Borges ironically observes: "Pascal, they tell us, found God, but his manifestation of that joy is less eloquent than his manifestation of solitude, in which he had no equal" (94).[149] The note also affirms that Pascal cares more about refuting God's deniers than about God himself, and that the greatness of God is not as amazing to him as the greatness of creation (95). In other words, Borges's Pascal does not care much about God or his greatness.

Yet another way to lead Pascal out of the realm of a narrow-minded version of Christianity is to connect him to non-Christian thinkers. Borges reports that the editor claims that Pascal was influenced by the Bible. The Argentine writer then associates Pascal with other, non-Christian, sources. Specifically, he notes that Pascal could be connected to, for example, the eleventh-century Persian philosopher al-Ghazali (1058-1111) and notes that Asín makes the same point in his book *Islamic Imprints*. Borges also identifies similarities between Pascal, Plato,

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introd. et des notes descriptives par Zacharie Tourneur (*Thoughts of Blaise Pascal: Paleographic Edition of the Original Manuscripts Preserved at the National Library Enriched with Many New Lessons and Presented in the Original Classification / With an Introduction and Descriptive Notes by Zacharie Tourneur*), published in Paris in 1942.

[149] "Pascal, nos dicen, halló a Dios, pero su manifestación de esa dicha es menos elocuente que su manifestación de la soledad. Fue incomparable en esta" ("Otras inquisiciones" 81).

the German mathematician and philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716) and the French poet Victor Hugo (1802-1885). We are again in the presence of a pastiche that decouples an author from a specific nation and religion—in this case, Pascal from a parochial variation of both France and Christianity. In the previous chapter we examined how Borges had lumped together Cervantes with the Kabbalah and the *Nights* (among others) and Manrique with Arabic poetry, Dante, Browning, Unamuno and Whitman. Here, Pascal is yoked together with "pagans" (Plato), with Muslims (Al-Ghazali) and with Germans (von Leibniz). The inclusion of a German thinker in the pastiche becomes especially significant when we consider that Borges is writing amidst the height of Second World War; this was not a time in which the commonalities between Germany and France were being celebrated.

Curtius and Tourneur clearly illustrate that, in mid-twentieth-century academia, the penchant to distance Europe from anything Semitic was quite strong. Tourneur especially echoes the views of Spanish traditionalists. Conservative scholars see perfect Christians in Pascal, Cervantes or Manrique, and often choose the fundamentalist strand of Catholicism which best reflects their own chauvinism. Both Curtius and Tourneur fail to acknowledge the fact that Christian thinkers like Aquinas or Pascal could have been influenced by Arabic scholarship. This is a view that intellectuals belonging to another strand of Catholicism, like Asín, had no problem in endorsing. Asín, as we shall see, also inspires Borges's views on Dante.

From Islamic Eschatology to al-Andalus to Dante to Buenos Aires

In his forties, Borges wrote the tales for which he would become a world-renowned author. Among them were "The Aleph" and "The Zahir." "The Aleph" was first published in 1945 and

"The Zahir" appeared two years later, in 1947.[150] As Borges himself admitted "The Zahir" was "more or less 'The Aleph' once again" (Williamson 297). These two are among Borges's most commentated texts, and their stories contain numerous references to Dante. Specialists who have analyzed their Dantean resonances include Humberto Núñez-Faraco, Menocal, Jon Thiem, Edwin Williamson and Roberto González Echevarría, among many others.[151] The tales' multiple, repetitive and evident allusions to the works of Dante certainly validate the focus on the Florentine poet. Scholars have overlooked, however, the fact that the tales also evoke al-Andalus. The Andalusi presence, I will argue, not only deserves consideration; it represents the key to untangling the philological implications of these celebrated tales.

The Aleph and the Zahir are magical objects, and throughout history, both had acquired multiple forms in different global regions. Both of them were, at one point, in al-Andalus. The tale "The Aleph" tells us that the magical contraption had once been a mirror; specifically, it was "the mirror that Ṭāriq Ibn Siyād found in a tower (*1001 Nights*, 272)" (285).[152] Here Borges is bringing to mind the 711 CE conquest and the tale of the *Nights* about this conquest, which he rewrites as "The Chamber of Statues." The opening paragraph of "The Zahir" reports that the Zahir had been an astrolabe and coin. It had also been a vein in the marble of one of the twelve thousand columns of the *aljama* of Cordoba in Islamic Spain. This *aljama*, which I alluded to in the first chapter, is one of the most conspicuous symbols of al-Andalus, and still stands today.

[150] In their twentieth-century Argentine form, The Zahir and the Aleph share their round shape and small size. González Echevarría notes other similarities. The protagonist of both "The Aleph" and "The Zahir" are writers. The Aleph is a letter and the Zahir is a coin; both of them are thus part of sequences, symbolizing value. "Each is an indivisible object, complete unto itself, yet repeatable *ad infinitum*" ("The Aleph" 129). According to González Echevarría, the "threatening presence of infinity" drives the narrator of "The Zahir" insane.

[151] On Borges and Dante see: Núñez-Faraco, *Borges and Dante.* See also: Thiem; Menocal, *Writing in Dante's Cult of Truth* 2443–3192 ("IV. Blindness, Aleph and Lovers"); Williamson 275-310 ("19. The New Beatrice"; "20. Humiliation and Anguish"; "21. False Hopes") and González Echevarría, "The Aleph." For a detailed description of all the Dantean references in "The Zahir" see Núñez-Faraco, "The Theme of Lovesickness in 'El Zahir'" 138-48.

[152] "el espejo que Tárik Benzeyad encontró en una torre (*1001 Noches*, 272)" (Borges, "El Aleph" 627).

Albarrana towers, also mentioned in "The Zahir," also remain as unequivocal material traces of the Arabic presence in the Peninsula. They are detached mural towers along the exterior walls of castles built during the Almohad period and—this is particularly revealing—they are only found in al-Andalus (P. Burton 241).

"The Aleph" also makes a point to mention the famed Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406). The real Aleph, we are told, lies in the center of a column of a Cairo mosque. Although the mosque dates from the seventh century, "the columns were taken from other, pre-Islamic, temples, for as Ibn-Khaldün has written: 'In the republics founded by nomads, the attendance of foreigners is essential for all those things that bear upon carpentry'" (285-6).[153] Ibn Khaldun's name is prominent throughout Mediterranean cultures, including both al-Andalus and the north of Africa. He was born in Tunis and he lived most of his life in different Mediterranean regions outside of Iberia: Tunis but also Cairo, Fez and Tlemcen. Yet, his connections to the Andalusi world run deep: his family was originally from Seville, he headed diplomatic missions in Granada, and he wrote on the history of al-Andalus (Harvey 20-2; Issawi N.p.; Ahmad 248-54).

Moreover, the story clarifies that the name "Aleph" derives from the Kabbalah traditions (285), many of which were shaped in Medieval Iberia by Moses of Leon. The word "Zahir" echoes another mystical movement that had important Andalusi followers: Sufism. The tale does not state outright that the word "Zahir" is linked to Sufism, but it does clarify that it is an Arabic word which means "apparent." This particular Arabic term has deep resonances in Sufi mysticism. The Sufi specialist Victor Danner explains that "the words 'the Interior' (*al-Bātin*) and 'the Exterior' (*az-zāhir*) are two of the Names of God and are drawn from the Qur'an: 'He is

[153] "las columnas proceden de otros templos de religiones anteislámicas, pues como ha escrito Abenjaldún: 'En las repúblicas fundadas por nómadas, es indispensable el concurso de forasteros para todo lo que sea albañilería'" ("El Aleph" 627).

the First and the Last and the Exterior and the Interior' (57:3). This is one of the richest verses of the Qur'an and has often been used by the Sufis" (Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh et al. 136). The tale repeatedly conjures Sufi mysticism. Luce López-Baralt analyzes these Sufi resonances in an article entitled "Borges o la mística del silencio: Lo que había del otro lado del *Zahir*" ("Borges or the Mystique of Silence: What Stood on the Other Side of the Zahir") (1999).[154] In a scene that evokes Sufism, Borges receives the Zahir as change when he pays for his drink in a bar where some locals are playing cards. López-Baralt notes that this picture connects to Sufism in two different ways. First, "drunkenness and alcohol are encoded, in the *trovar clus* of Islamic mystical poetry, in terms of transforming ecstasy" (36).[155] Second, the card game evokes randomness and the fact that the ecstatic experience is always a freely received infused grace (36).[156] Thus, even the names of the objects that inspire the tales, Aleph and Zahir, link them to al-Andalus through the Kabbalah and Sufism respectively.

Both stories are narrated in the first person by a writer named "Borges" who is distraught by the death of his beloved. In "The Aleph" the name of the woman is Beatriz Viterbo, a clear corollary to Dante's Beatrice. The tale also discusses an Argentine poet of Italian origin named Carlos Argentino Daneri, whose surname is a variation of Dan-te Alighi-eri. This Italian-Argentine poet writes a series of Cantos entitled "The Earth," a sort of alternative *Commedia*. In "The Zahir," "Borges" gradually loses his mind after his beloved dies. This time, the name of the beloved woman is Teodelina Villar and, as expected in a story which is dialoguing with the tradition of courtly love, Teodelina was beautiful and had rejected "Borges."

[154] The Sufi resonances of Borges's stories have also been analyzed by Giovanna de Garayalde in her book *Jorge Luis Borges: Sources and Illumination* (1978).
[155] "la embriaguez y el alcohol se codifican, en el *trovar clus* de la poesía mística islámica, en términos de éxtasis transformante" (López-Baralt, "Borges" 36).
[156] For an argument in the sense that according to Borges Islam is antithetical to Romantic love see: Almond 440.

After Teodelina's funeral, "Borges" comes into possession of a coin, the Zahir, and becomes increasingly fixated upon it. Scholars have consistently maintained that an obsession with an adored woman stands behind the obsession with the Zahir; one simply replaces the other. López-Baralt identifies several parallels between Teodelina and the magic coin that reinforce this notion. For starters, López-Baralt points out, the words "Zahir" and "Teodelina" share certain revealing linguistic characters:

> And even the name, *Teo-delina*, links her with the Zahir, because it is a cryptic name linguistically equivalent to the nickel disk at hand. While *Teo* refers to God, *Delina* (from the Greek *dēlō*, "to clarify," "to make visible or apparent") returns us to the principal meaning of the Arabic root *z-h-r*, to make "notorious" or "visible." As the Zahir, *Teo-delina*—the exterior or visible God—also has its reverse—*a-dēlō*—the hidden and mysterious, as she remains unreachable throughout the story. ("Borges" 34) [157]

López-Baralt also detects several other coincidences between Teodelina and the Zahir. When she dies, Teodelina looks as she did when she was in her twenties; the value of the Zahir is twenty cents (35). "Borges" thinks of burying the coin in a garden; Teodelina was, too, buried (36). "Borges" forgets Teodelina, but is incapable of forgetting the Zahir (37). López-Baralt concludes that "[j]ust as in 'The Aleph,' the dead beloved is replaced by a magical object of mystical overtones" (37).[158] In his well-known *Jorge Luis Borges: A Literary Biography* (1978) Emir Rodríguez Monegal argues that in "The Zahir" Borges disguises an "erotic fixation" with his "erudite, cabbalistic narrative" (413-4). More recently, González Echevarría says that "the whole thing is like a defense mechanism to ward off the pain he has suffered with Teodelina's death" ("The Aleph" 129). Similarly, Williamson argues that the story is inspired by the unrequited love

[157] "Y ya el nombre, *Teo-delina*, la gemina con el Zahir, pues se trata de un nombre críptico que equivale lingüísticamente al disco de níquel que nos ocupa. Si bien *Teo* nos refiere a Dios, *delína* (del griego *dēlō,* "aclarar", "hacer visible o evidente") nos devuelve al sentido principal de la raíz árabe *z-h-r*, hacer "notoria" o "visible". Como el Zahir, *Teo-delína* —el Dios exterior o visible— tiene también su reverso —*a-dēlō*— lo oculto y misterioso, ya que permanece inalcanzable a lo largo del relato" (López-Baralt, "Borges" 34).

[158] "Exactamente igual que en 'El Aleph,' la amada muerta es sustituida por un objeto mágico de sobretonos místicos" (López-Baralt, "Borges" 37).

Borges felt for his "new Beatrice," a Buenos Aires resident named Estela Canto (1919-1994) (297-8).

Dante is not the only literary allusion in the tale. In his article "The Theme of Lovesickness in 'El Zahir'" (2002) Núñez-Faraco expands the possible intertextual games played by "The Zahir." Núñez-Faraco shows that although Dante is certainly the key to the tale, the story is establishing a conversation, more generally, with the literary tradition of "lovesickness"—a tradition that, for the purposes of this study, could be equated with courtly love. The conventions of love-madness describe love frustrations in pathological terms: the disdained lover suffers an intense psychological and even physical pain, the treatment consists of keeping oneself occupied, and the final cure is achieved by forgetting the object of the pathological obsession. Núñez-Faraco shows how these topics appear in Borges's tale, and likewise in a wide range of sources on the theme of love-madness. They appear in Dante's *Commedia,* but also in Capellanus's *The Art of Courtly Love,* the *Roman de la Rose* (c.1230-1274), Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Robert Burton (1577-1640)'s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). Núñez-Faraco suggests that the motif of love also determines the Islamic allusions in the tale. In the Sufi tradition, he explains, the sexual union comes to symbolize the divine union, and thus the orgasm becomes analogous to a mystical rapture (120). Núñez-Faraco's main argument is that Borges's tale parodies and mocks the principles of love-madness by creating a stark contrast between them and the concrete, trite and earthly reality of the Buenos Aires in which the tale is set (119). From Núñez-Faraco's argument, we can infer that the theme of love is the main reason for Borges's juxtaposition of abundant Islamic references with an evidently Christian epic like the *Commedia*. However, his and other theories leave unexplained the reasons why Borges

makes a point to call to mind al-Andalus, or why the tale lays down the academic debates about the origin of the Zahir.

The reader of the story learns that scholars agree that the Zahir is of Islamic ancestry, but disagree on the date and circumstances of its origin, which are never disclosed. Some academics like Julius Barlach consider that it first appeared in the eighteenth century. Others, like Zotenberg, attribute it to Abu'l-Fida (1273-1331), thus pinpointing the origin sometime during the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Yet, Philip Meadows Taylor goes even farther back, tracing its origins to the age of ignorance (before the eighth century). Back then, according to Taylor, the Zahir was the idol called Yahuk, and then a prophet from Khorasan who wore a mask of gold or a veil spangled with precious stones.

The academicians' claims are apocryphal. Still, the reader is left with the impression that she has read an outline of a philological debate: emotions run high, and in the end no one can tell for sure where or when a certain convention originated. By the time that the debate is described, the reader should have learned that the obsession with the Zahir actually stands for the obsession with a venerated woman. The question thus becomes: if the belief in the Zahir is a metaphor for the belief in a venerated woman, and the belief in the Zahir is of Islamic origin, does this mean that the belief in a divine woman is of Islamic origin too? If so, how is this tradition related to Dante?

The debates that Borges stages evoke those about the origin of the tradition of courtly love and on the possible Islamic ancestry of Dante's eschatology. This should make readers think of Asín. I propose that the key to Borges's Dante-Islamic connection can be found by reading "The Aleph" and "The Zahir" contrapuntally with *Muslim Eschatology in the Divine Comedy*. I have mentioned that at the time that Borges writes, the possibility of Islamic thought having

influenced the Florentine poet caused concern in the scholarly community. To this day, the issue continues to be at the heart of bitter arguments. Mallette affirms that the disputes are "the rough equivalent, in the world of comparative medieval philology, of the Paris-Dakar rally" (41). Asín is central to the Dantean philological rally and, as mentioned earlier, his name frequently pops up in Borges's essays and stories.[159]

Asín argues that the whole notion of a poet being able to access heaven and hell, and being able to describe them in minute detail, had had a long history in the Muslim world before it acquired its Catholic mold through Dante. He opens his book by explaining that the Koran contains a short passage that has engendered a complex and rich tradition of stories recounting Muhammad's travels and visions. The section reads: "Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night from the sacred place of worship to the furthest place of worship, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him some of Our signs" (Haleem N.p.). After his death, stories started circulating about Muhammad having mystical visions in which he travels to the afterworld of the dead. The stories of the visions became increasingly sophisticated, to the point that a distinct and prolific genre known as the mirāj is devoted to them. The *Kitab al-Mirāj* (translated into Latin in 1264 as *Liber Scalae Machometi* or *The Book of the Ladder*) is representative of the genre. At first, the legends were limited to describing the trip of souls or mystical beings to the world of the dead, and they were always attributed to Muhammad. But soon, Sufis appropriated the basic plot of the story, albeit changing some of its basic features. They begin to position themselves in the role of protagonists. Asín places an Andalusi mystic named Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) at the center of this Sufi tradition. Ibn Arabi writes his *Book of the Night Journey to the Majesty of the*

[159] A collection of essays called *Dante and Islam* (2015), edited by Jan. M. Ziolkowski, provides an outline of the history of the controversy on Dante's Islam and includes the most recent articles published on the topic.

Most Generous (in Asín's translation, *Libro del nocturno viaje hacia la Majestad del más Generoso*) during the thirteenth century (61).

Orthodox Islamic theologians harshly criticized the Sufis' audacity, even when the Sufi legends retained their mystical aura. The trips were taken by flesh and bone humans, but at least they were supposed to lead them to the vision of God (Asín 60). However, Abul ʿAla Al-Maʿarri (973-1057), a daring and talented poet from a region that is now known as Syria, would go even further. A free thinker, he would revolutionize the mirāj genre by writing an autobiographical account in which, like Dante, he himself (instead of Muhammad or a mystic) went to paradise and had the opportunity talk to different poets. In Asín's words: "The traveler is no longer a prophet or even a mystic, but a simple man, sinful and imperfect, like Dante" (78).[160] In the theory propounded by Asín, Al-Maʿarri, Ibn Arabi and Dante become other versions of Muhammad. Their travels to paradise and hell become yet another rendering of Muhammad's nocturnal travels.

Asín explains that the boldness of Al-Maʿarri was also shown in his choice of "episodic characters" who were "not either, mostly prophets and saints, but mere men, sinners and penitent infidels, such as those that abound in Dante's journey" (78).[161] In addition, the criteria that Al-Maʿarri used to discriminate those who deserved hell from those who would be in heaven does not respect traditional standards of virtue. Asín explains: "the author is carried away by his literary sympathies or antipathies to deliver to the flames or put in paradise the characters as he

[160] "el viajero ya no es un profeta, ni siquiera un místico, sino un simple hombre, pecador e imperfecto, lo mismo que Dante" (Asín Palacios, *La escatología* 78).
[161] "los personajes episódicos no son tampoco, en su mayoría, profetas y santos, sino meros hombres, pecadores y hasta infieles penitentes, como los que abundan en el viaje dantesco" (Asín Palacios, *La escatología* 78).

pleases, lamenting or rejoicing, as appropriate, for their sad fate or for their bliss" (80).[162] He could, basically, send his critics to hell.

Although Al-Maʿarri plays a significant role in Asín's theory, the above-mentioned Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi takes center stage. Asín finds striking parallels between the works of this Sufi mystic from Murcia and those of Dante. He posits that Dante's *Convivio* (*The Banquet*) (c. 1307) is organizationally similar to Ibn Arabi's most recognized work, the *Al-Futûhât al-makkiyya* (*The Meccan Openings*) (hereinafter, *Futuhat*). *Convivio* is composed of an introductory book followed by three books that each include a long poem and a prose allegorical study of the poem. Asín observes that the *Futuhat* bears a similar structure: each chapter is headed by a poem followed by a commentary. Dante also shares with Sufi poets like Ibn Arabi the symbolism that they attribute to erotic poetry. The captivating eyes are an allegory for God's wisdom, the smile of the beloved stands for the divine power of persuasion and the anguish that it inspires allegorizes the soul's struggles as it comes closer to God. In his *Futuhat*, Ibn Arabi describes the anguish and even physical pain caused by love: the crying, the insomnia, the sadness, the stupidity and the jealousy. Ibn Arabi theorizes that love aims at the union of the bodies and the souls, and at the supernatural union with God. He affirms—according to Asín, with "sublime audacity"—that God is the one that is manifested once the veil of the beloved is lifted, and that he would not adore her if divinity did not lie in her (350).[163] In the opinion of Ibn Arabi,

> the Creator is disguised, so that we can love him, under the appearance of the beautiful Zeinab, of Zoad, of Hind, of Leila, of all the kind maidens whose physical attractions the poets sang in elegant verses, without suspecting what only enlightened mystics understand, namely, that their epithalamiums and gallant songs are always talking about

[162] "el autor se deja llevar de sus simpatías o antipatías literarias para entregar a las llamas o poner en el paraíso a los personajes que bien le place, lamentándose o gozándose, según los casos y personas, de su triste destino o de su bienaventuranza" (Asín Palacios, *La escatología* 80).
[163] "sublime audacia" (Asín Palacios, *La escatología* 350).

God, the only real beauty, hidden behind the gauze of corporeal forms. (350-1)[164]

Asín observes that even the occasion for the writing of love poems is similar in both Dante and Ibn Arabi. In *Convivio*, the contemplation of a wise and beautiful woman inspires the poetry. Asín translates into Spanish an extract of Ibn Arabi's works in which he explains that the contemplation of a chaste, wise and beautiful woman motivated him to write his verses. (Interestingly, the name of the father of this woman was, according to the translation of Asín, "Záhir Benróstam" [342]). Asín concludes his volume by praising the work of Ibn Arabi, this "mystic theologian and exquisite Spanish poet" (351). He is "the most typical and suggestive of [Dante's Islamic] models" and even "the richest key to the enigmas of Dante" (351).[165] To Asín, this Sufi poet from al-Andalus played a key role in the configuration of some of the basic tenets of the *Commedia*. The theory of this Spanish scholar positions al-Andalus, and by extension Spain, at the center of the magnificent Florentine poem.

The Arabic thesis advanced by Asín had a mixed reception. On the one hand, it drew the admiration of scholars from Europe and from North and South America (Mallette 41). On the other hand, it was also dismissed on several grounds, many of which were clearly based on prejudice. Some scholars simply could not bear the thought of the greatest Christian apologia of all times having been influenced by Islamic theology. However, some of the objections were legitimate. At the time Asín writes, there was no clear evidence of the Christian West ever having accessed the *Book of the Ladder*.[166] However, in 1949, after Asín died and a few years

[164] "el Creador se nos disfraza, para que le amemos, bajo las apariencias de la bella Zeinab, de Zoad, de Hind, de Leila, de todas las amables doncellas cuyo físicos atractivos los poetas cantaron en elegantes versos, sin sospechar siquiera lo que solo los místicos iluminados entienden, es decir, que en sus epitalamios y canciones galantes se habla siempre de Dios, única hermosura real, oculta tras el cendal de formas corpóreas" (Asín Palacios, *La escatología* 350-1).

[165] "el más típico y sugestivo de [los] modelos [Islámicos de Dante]…la más rica clave de los enigmas dantescos" (Asín Palacios, *La escatología* 351).

[166] On the possible Arabic influences on Dante see also: "Italy, Dante and the Anxieties of Influence" (Menocal, *The Arabic Role* 115-36).

after Borges had published his tales, Medieval Latin and French versions of the key book surfaced. As Mallette observes, the discovery was done "six centuries after it was created, two centuries after a bibliographer noted the presence of a Latin translation in a French library, and six years after Miguel Asín's death" (Mallette 44). The finding, however, "has failed to satisfy the scholarly community as a whole" (Mallette 45). This explains why, as the literary scholar Jan M. Ziolkowski observes, even nowadays the wording "Dante and Islam…may sound jarringly paradoxical" ("Introduction" 1).

To Borges, however, there was nothing paradoxical about Dante and Islam. The essays "Sobre los clásicos" ("On Classics") (1941) and "Historia de la eternidad" ("A History of Eternity") (1936), both published before the writing of "The Aleph" and "The Zahir," confirm that Borges endorsed Asín's theory. In "On Classics" Borges says that Dante "embraces Hellenic myths, Virgilian poetry, the Aristotelian and the Platonic orbs, the speculations of Albert the Great and of Thomas Aquinas, Hebrew prophecies and (since Asín) the eschatological traditions of Islam" (9).[167] A footnote to "A History of Eternity" mentions that the *burak* belongs to the "Islamic traditions of the *mirāj* cycle" (361).[168] We can find more details about this curious figure in the entry for the *burak* of Borges's *El libro de los seres imaginarios* (*Book of Imaginary Beings*) (1967). Here Borges cites the Koran passage about Muhammad's night trip,

[167] "abarca los mitos helénicos, la poesía virgiliana, el orbe aristotélico y el platónico, las especulaciones de Alberto Magno y de Tomás de Aquino, las profecías hebreas y (desde Asín Palacios) las tradiciones escatológicas del Islam" (Borges, "Sobre los clásicos" 9).

[168] "tradiciones islámicas del ciclo del miraj" ("Historia de la eternidad" 361). Another footnote to the same essay ("A History of Eternity") mentions that in Persian and Arabic literatures it is common to find examples of someone who falls in love only by hearing about his beloved: "To hear the description of a queen—the hair similar to the nights apart and the emigration but the face as the day of delight, the breasts like ivory spheres that give light to the moon, the walking that shames antelopes and causes the desperation of willows, the wide hips that prevent from standing, the feet narrow as a spearhead—and to fall in love with her until placidity and death, is one of the traditional themes of the 1001 Nights" ["Oír la descripción de una reina –la cabellera semejante a las noches de separación y la emigración pero la cara como el día de la delicia, los pechos como esferas de marfil que dan luz a las lunas, el andar que avergüenza a los antílopes y provoca la desesperación de los sauces, las onerosas caderas que impiden tenerse en pie, los pies estrechos como una cabeza de lanza– y enamorarse de ella hasta la placidez y la muerte, es uno de los temas tradicionales de las 1001 Noches"] ("Historia de la eternidad" 358).

and reports that it inspired a series of legends. In their early versions Muhammad was guided by a man or an angel, but in later iterations a *burak* takes their place. The *burak* is a divine animal larger than a donkey and smaller than a mule, and its name means "radiant" (Borges and Guerrero, "Libro de los seres imaginarios" 599). "Borges states that Asín alludes to a Murcian mystic of the thirteenth century—he is alluding to Ibn Arabi—who in an allegory entitled *Book of the Night Journey to the Majesty of the Most Generous*, finds in the *burak* a symbol of divine love. Asín does, in fact, state this in the first chapter of *Muslim Eschatology in the Divine Comedy* (62).

It would be a stretch to affirm that "The Zahir" represents a clear endorsement of the Arabic thesis. It is indisputable, however, that the tale calls to mind the tradition of courtly love and evokes the debates about the origins of this genre. It also conjures up Sufism and includes several reminders of the fact that during the Middle Ages, "Spain" was part of an Arabic-speaking world. In the reader's mind it becomes highly likely that Borges is toying with the idea that the tradition of courtly love originated in an Arabic context, and that al-Andalus played a substantial role in its transmission to the West. At the very minimum, the reader is left with the impression of ideas about courtly love traveling to unexpected times and places. This brings to mind the notion of metempsychosis. "The Zahir" insinuates that courtly love conventions and the women they claim to revere are as fungible as the Zahir itself—the Zeinab, Zoad, Hind and Leila of Ibn Arabi become the Beatrice of Dante and the Teodelina of "Borges." The idea that they are all Zahirs—the visible aspect of God—travelled, through metempsychosis, from Ibn Arabi, to Dante, to "Borges." Courtly love conventions voyaged through al-Andalus and Italy, floated in the Mediterranean Sea, and then crossed the Atlantic, so that they could acquire a twentieth-century Latin American (parodic) form.

This interpretation is confirmed when we do a close reading of "The Aleph." This philological tale also includes subtle but unmistakable allusions to the theory of Asín. As mentioned above, the word "Aleph" is of Kabbalistic ascendance. Not incidentally, according to Asín, the Kabbalah is one of the points that links Ibn Arabi with Dante. Dante's *Commedia* and *Vita Nuova*, and Ibn Arabi's *Futuhat*, all reveal a belief in the secret properties and virtues of numbers, and their relationship to letters (Asín 336).[169] Without this Kabbalistic link between the Andalusi Ibn Arabi and the Florentine Dante, the Kabbalistic origin of the word Aleph, or the allusions to al-Andalus, appear to be one of Borges's flights of fancy. But once Asín's theory is taken into account, all the elements of the story start to fit together.

"The Aleph" mentions that the poet Daneri was so impressed with a coffee shop that he praised the fact that it was "a la par" with the more chic ones in "Flores" (278).[170] Flores is a neighborhood of Buenos Aires and, although picturesque, it seems like an odd choice when one is looking for a paradigm of elegance and classiness. Recoleta would have been a much more natural choice. I suspect that Borges chooses this particular neighborhood for two reasons: first, because it was home to many Arabic-speaking immigrants, and second because *flores* is the Spanish word for flowers, and flowers abound in the Islamic paradise described by Asín. The Arabic-speaking world, and paradise, are also insinuated by several other images in the story.

The image of a divine light is implied more than once. Daneri "pretended to be amazed" by the lighting of the classy coffee shop (278).[171] The idea of this light as divine derives from the fact that his pretention of amazement is followed by a disquisition on different ways to name the

[169] According to Asín, Dante seems especially prone to the numbers nine, three, two and a thousand, while Ibn Arabi preferred to concentrate on the numbers four, one, three and eight (Asín Palacios, *La escatología* 336).
[170] "se parangona…Flores" ("El Aleph" 621). *Encopetado* is usually associated with snobbery, but it could also insinuate heights.
[171] "fingió asombrarse" ("El Aleph" 621).

colors blue and white. These happen to be the colors of the sky, of heaven—a fact that the story is careful to mention. The Aleph is described as containing "all stars, all lamps, all sources of light" (281).[172] Daneri is an alter ego of Dante, whose heaven is also plentiful with light. In addition, the tale includes numerous allusions to al-Andalus—a connection that should take the reader to *Muslim Eschatology in the Divine Comedy.* The volume is rife with detailed and repetitive descriptions of the Islamic afterlife. One of the most outstanding features of the Islamic paradise, as described by Asín, is the representation of God as a bright and even blinding light. This notion, according to the Spanish scholar, had existed in Islam and in Sufism for centuries before it was adopted by Christian theology. Another image that pops up repeatedly in Asín's book is that of a region of hell with a river of boiling sulfur water (113, 117, 233-4, 250, 294). Interestingly, sulfuric acid comes up in the tale when Daneri rails against his critics. He does not exactly send them to the region of hell in which one could find sulfuric acid; Daneri only says that these people (his critics) possess neither precious metals (which abound in the Islamic paradise of Asín) nor the "steam presses, laminators, and sulfuric acids necessary for minting treasures" (279).[173] The mention of this distinctive element of Asín's Islamic hell is curious. For the reader that has detected the other allusions to his Muslim eschatology, the comment could suggest the image of hell, and of literary enemies in hell. Is Daneri becoming, just like Al-Maʿarri, Ibn Arabi and Dante—and Muhammad before them—someone who travels to heaven and hell?

Daneri does assimilate himself to Muslim poets and even to Muhammad. Daneri writes a letter to "Borges" glowing about having received a literary prize: "I received your mournful

[172] "todos los lugares de la tierra…todas las luminarias, todas las lámparas, todos los veneros de luz" ("El Aleph" 623).
[173] "prensas de vapor, laminadores y ácidos sulfúricos para la acuñación de tesoros" ("El Aleph" 621).

congratulations…You scoff, my lamentable friend, in envy, but you shall confess—though the words stick in your throat!—that this time I have crowned my cap with the most scarlet of plumes; my turban with the most caliphal of rubies" (284).[174] Daneri also compares the studio of a modern writer (like him) with an *albarrana* tower. A mere paragraph later we are told that Daneri thinks that, with all its modern communication technologies, "this twentieth century of ours has upended the fable of Muhammad and the mountain—mountains nowadays did in fact come to the modern Muhammad" (276).[175] Daneri's mention of the fable of Muhammad and the mountain strikes the narrator of the story as being associated with literature, and it is included a mere few paragraphs before Daneri's cantos are mentioned. A reader familiar with the works of Asín cannot miss the references: the writer's cap of a poet of Italian origin who writes cantos is just a variation of a turban; his office is just another version of an Andalusi *albarrana* tower. The mountain, we later learn, is the Aleph: the Aleph—not modern communication technologies—is what allows the visions of this modern Muhammad who is also a variation of Dante.

Through metempsychosis, in "The Aleph," incorporeal ideas about love and the afterlife migrated somehow from the mind of Muhammad (as revealed in stories about him) to the mind of Ibn Arabi to that of Dante to that of Carlos Argentino Daneri—who, by his own admission, was a "modern Muhammad." Thus, Borges's story "The Aleph" could be read as yet another rendition of the mirāj genre—yet another way of telling a story that had also been told by Dante. Once again, as in "The Zahir," the reader is left with the feeling that the "European" tradition of

[174] "Recibí tu apenada congratulación…Bufas, mi lamentable amigo, de envidia, pero confesarás —¡aunque te ahoge!— que esta vez pude coronar mi bonete con la más roja de las plumas; mi turbante con el más *califa* de los rubíes" ("El Aleph" 626; the Italics are in the original).
[175] "nuestro siglo XX había transformado la fábula de Mahoma y de la montaña; las montañas, ahora, convergían sobre el moderno Mahoma" ("El Aleph" 618).

courtly love could have had its origins in the Islamic world, at a time when al-Andalus was a part of it.

The *Nights* Travel from Egypt to al-Andalus to Roncesvalles to the Rest of Europe

"No man can write a book" (*Dreamtigers* 83).[176] This is the stark opening line to one of Borges's longest poems, "Ariosto y los Árabes" ("Ariosto and the Arabs") (1960). The verses immediately clarify that for a book to be written, centuries teeming with wars and sea adventures need to go by. These events become the stage for the telling of stories, which are transported and reshaped to create more legends, narratives or, to use Borges's terminology, dreams. One of them is the *Orlando Furioso*. As Borges's poem suggests, Ariosto's magnum opus was formed out of the leftovers of dreams:

> The dross of dreams that have no shape —
> The mud that the Nile of sleep leaves by —
> With the stuff of these for skein, he'd move
> Through that gleaming labyrinth and escape (*Dreamtigers* 83)[177]

And thus the main topic of the poem is introduced: how topos, tropes and plots of one region are weaved into poems and narratives from another.

The first part of the poem concentrates on the motley and variegated sources of the lengthy *Orlando Furioso* or, as Borges says, on the threads from which it is weaved. Three stanzas are dedicated to the traditional European sources of the text, with one evoking the Matter of France, another one the Matter of Britain, and the third one the tradition of the Boreal Islands. The stanza on France is an acknowledgment of the fact that the poem is loosely based in the French foundational epic, *La Chanson de Roland* (*Chanson de Roland*) (c. 1129-65). The

[176] "Nadie puede escribir un libro" ("El hacedor" 214).
[177] "Escoria de los sueños, indistinto / limo que el Nilo de los sueños deja, / con ellos fue tejida la madeja / de ese resplandeciente laberinto" ("El hacedor" 215).

Chanson de Roland sings about the 778 CE defeat of Roland (supposedly the nephew of Charlemagne) in Roncesvalles. There is much evidence that Charlemagne's rear guard was actually destroyed by Basque tribes. However, in the famed *Chanson de Roland* and, to a certain extent, in the *Orlando Furioso*, the tribes are described as Saracens and the battle is converted from a secular fight into a religious struggle. This would be a first explanation of why the poem is titled "Ariosto and the Arabs": it is as much about the Italian poet as it is about the encounter between Arab and "European" cultures. One of the key sites of this encounter is Roncesvalles, which is now in the north of Spain. Following the section on the French, another stanza acknowledges the influx of the Arthurian legends on Ariosto. Yet another stanza evokes the Scandinavian legend of the ring of fire.

The poem then transports the reader to the East. Immediately after the Scandinavian stanza, it is suggested that the episode of the flying horse in the *Orlando Furioso* may have had a Persian origin. The poetic voice seems, however, to be uncertain about it:

> From Persia to Parnassus — who knows where? —
> That dream of an armed enchanter driving
> A winged steed through the startled air
> And suddenly into the western desert diving. (*Dreamtigers* 82)[178]

We cannot tell for sure whether the story of the flying horse is from Persia or from "Parnassus," which may refer generically to the Muses or to Virgil (70 BCE-19 BCE). In his *Book of Imaginary Beings* Borges does mention Virgil as the origin of the myth of Ariosto's hippogryph ("Libro de los seres imaginarios" 647). In the poem, however, Borges opens the door to consider the possibility of an originary Persian horse.

[178] "Quién sabe si de Persia o del Parnaso / vino aquel sueño del corcel alado / que por el aire el hechicero armado / urge y que se hunde en el desierto ocaso" ("El hacedor" 214).

Five stanzas concentrate on the *Nights*, and offer Borges's characteristically concise and evocative style at its best. In this context, the significance of the "mud of the Nile" mentioned earlier becomes clear. Egypt plays a substantial role in the forging and transmission of many tales of the *Nights*, and Borges's poem conjures up a series of the *Nights*'s topos. Two of them consist of animals that are as fantastic as the flying horse: the *rukh* and the *bahamut*. The *rukh* is a giant bird with claws so powerful that they could carry elephants, alluded by Borges's reference to the "cruel / Claws that an elephant grip" (*Dreamtigers* 84).[179] The *bahamut* is a giant fish on which a bull stands, on which the earth stands and is conjured up in the poem by referring to "The earth sustained by a bull, the bull / By a fish" (*Dreamtigers* 84).[180] Besides these humongous air and sea animals, Borges's poem also alludes to a magnetic mountain, to abracadabras, to old talismans and to mystic words that can open caves of gold. All these elements show up in the *Nights*. "The *rukh*," Irwin writes, "appears in 'Abd al-Rahman the Maghribi's Story of the Ruhk' and again in 'The Second Voyage of Simbad'" (3590).[181] The *bahamut* can be found in Night 496, as Borges himself explains in the *Book of Imaginary Beings*. In this night we are told how "Almighty Allah hath created a great rock, and under the rock a bull, and under the bull a huge fish, and under the fish a mighty ocean" (R. Burton, *A Plain.*..5. 532). The magnetic mountain occurs in the story of the "Third Calender" (Tuczay 274).

More importantly, these images also make their appearance in traditional European tales. This is insinuated in the poem, which tells us how all these stories were dreamt by the Saracens, but that their dream "now lords…over the West" (*Dreamtigers* 84).[182] In other words, the *Nights* became a part of the general memory of mankind. In 1960, Borges published a note on the first

[179] "crueles / Garras de las que pende un elefante" ("El hacedor" 216).
[180] "La tierra sostenida por un toro / Y el toro por un pez" ("El hacedor" 216).
[181] On the *rukh*, see: Tuczay 280.
[182] "se adueñó de Occidente" ("El hacedor" 216).

Spanish translation of the *Nights*. He observed: "Orientalists believe that this almost accidental compilation was written in Egypt during the thirteenth century; Antoine Galland, around 1704, revealed it to the peoples of Europe and *is now part of the general memory of men*"[183] ("Cansinos-Asséns y 'Las mil y una noches,'" [Cansinos-Asséns and the *Thousand and One Nights*], *Textos recobrados 1956-1986* 45; the Italics are mine).[184]

Except for hinting at the possible Persian provenance of Ariosto's flying horse, Borges's poem does not provide specific examples of the influence that the *Nights* had in European texts, but the magnetic mountain, the *ruhk* and the *bahamut* all show up in European tales. The originally Islamic magnetic mountain ends up emerging in the Irish legend of Saint Brandan and in the travels of John Mandeville (c. 1300-1372) (Tuczay 275). The *rukh* makes its appearance in the pages of Marco Polo's Italian travelogue (Tuczay 280). Borges is careful to make this connection in his *Book of Imaginary Beings*, where he also recalls another fantastic sea animal that appears both in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and in medieval Arabic texts: the *zaratan*. He says that the *zaratan* is an animal so big that sailors had confused it with an island. The animal, he observes, shows up in the Irish legend of Saint Brandan.[185] Borges quotes Asín as an authority on the topic and even connects the humongous island-animal to *Moby-Dick*, which opens with a set of extracts that expose how the signifier "whale" traveled in literatures from different locations throughout the centuries. Borges is not outright suggesting that *Moby-Dick* is directly inspired by the *bahamut* or the *zaratan*, but he is positing what the epic whale novel did before him: that it is possible that the trope of the monstrous sea creature traveled to unexpected places.

[183] "Cansinos y *Las mil y una noches*" was originally published on July 10, 1960 in the Argentine daily *La Nación.*
[184] "Los orientalistas opinan que esta compilación casi accidental fue redactada en Egipto durante el siglo XIII; Antoine Galland, hacia 1704, la reveló a los pueblos de Europa y *hoy forma parte de la memoria general de los hombres*" ("Cansinos y 'Las mil y una noches,'" *Textos recobrados 1956-1986* 45; the Italics are mine).
[185] On the motif of the living island, see: Tuczay 285.

A sea animal of impossible size that was originally part of Islamicate lore ended up being a pivotal part of an American classic.

The main problem with "Ariosto and the Arabs" is that it thinks in terms of what the Arabs have given "us" Westerners. The same positioning of Arabs as providers of goods to the West can also be seen in Borges's selection of the passage by Wordsworth referenced in the previous chapter. In this story, all science and all poetry is at risk of being lost—for the West. An Arab, who is from the desert but also from Spain, gives the objects to the Western man and then—conveniently—leaves. This attitude is also revealed in Borges's article "Cansinos-Asséns y las *Mil y Una Noches*" ("Cansinos-Asséns and the *Thousand and One Nights*") (1960). In it, Borges claims that fortune had given "the Arabs" (again, the generic "Arabs") three missions: first, to predicate that there is only one God; second, to save Aristotle for the West and third, to dream and give "us" the *Thousand and One Nights*. On the one hand, it is certainly positive to acknowledge that what we call "Western" is not exclusively Western—that "Oriental" elements are an intricate part of it. On the other hand, however, there is a risk of portraying Arabs as mediums, as providers of intellectual "goods" for the West. One of the risks in adopting the Arabic thesis is creating an instrumental view of "the Arabs." Sometimes it seems as if the entire world existed for the benefit of the West: Africa to furnish slaves, the East to provide stories, South America to provide gold and raw materials. The West, in turn, grants all of them the gift of civilization. There are problematic implications in saying that a whole culture has three roles, and then defining two of those roles in terms of what they give to "us" (the West).

From the *Nights* to Chaucer to Shakespeare

The influence of the *Nights* in European stories is also insinuated in "La memoria de Shakespeare" ("Shakespeare's Memory"), the most philological of Borges's tales. Originally

published in 1983, "Shakespeare's Memory" is Borges's last published story and one of his most unappreciated tales.[186]

A twentieth-century German philologist who specializes in Shakespeare narrates the story in the first person. His name is Hermann Sörgel and he tells us that years ago he had come into possession of what, one would think, is the dream of every Shakespeare's specialist: the memory of the Bard himself. A man named Daniel Thorpe had given him the memory. A month went by and Sörgel did start "remembering" events of Shakespeare's life: normal, trite, and everyday facts of life. He dreamt about "unknown rooms and faces" and "remembered" how Shakespeare frequently talked to a neighbor that is not mentioned in his biographies (512).[187] At first Sörgel was thrilled with the gift. But then his own memories began to blend with Shakespeare's. He consequently feared for his mental health and bequeathed the gift-turned-curse.

In her article "Borges and Shakespeare, Shakespeare and Borges" (2005) Grace Tiffany argues that "dreams of Shakespeare's past only confirm that he is still Sörgel, to the point that, feeling finally burdened by Shakespeare's memory, he gives it away and resigns himself to being himself" (154). Yet, Sörgel's concluding remarks create the impression that Shakespeare's memory never really leaves him. To express that he is finally free from the burdensome memory, Sörgel utters an unmistakable Shakespearean line, the classic "[s]imply the thing I am shall make me live" ("Shakespeare's Memory" 515). He cannot resign himself to being his own identity. In

[186] Scholars seldom consider "Shakespeare's Memory." Christ, Bell-Villada and Williamson do not analyze the tale in their respective books on Borges. Woodall mentions the story in passing in his biography of Borges (256). Both Toswell and Penna agree in that Borges shows little or no interest in Shakespeare. Toswell says that, at least in his twenties, Borges "does not like Shakespeare" (688). Although Toswell tangentially refers to Borges's allusions to Chaucer, she does not mention "Shakespeare Memory." In this she coincides with Penna, who claims that there are not many allusions to Shakespeare in Borges's writings. Although Penna refers to Borges's tale "Everything and Nothing," she does not mention "Shakespeare's Memory" (100). Tiffany and Kristal, on the other hand, do explore the tale. However, they do not consider its philological connotations. I have briefly summarized Tiffany's position in the main body of the chapter. Kristal reads "Shakespeare's Memory" as a "meditation on the limited role that memory, understanding, or the will might play in the creative process" (4204-5).

[187] "rostros y habitaciones desconocidas" (Borges, "La memoria" 433).

one of his early essays, Borges wonders: "Is not one single repeated terminal point enough to disrupt and confound the series in time? Are the enthusiasts who devote themselves to a line of Shakespeare not literally Shakespeare?" (*Selected Non-Fictions* 323).[188] Sörgel has, in part—literally—become Shakespeare. The philologist also confesses that some mornings he wakes up wondering whose memory had inspired his dreams. Were they Sörgel's or Shakespeare's? Even during vigil, he sometimes feels the presence of the other's memory. In this uncertainty, I will argue, lies the crux of the story. I read the tale as a reflection on how the memory of others, and of even the proverbial "Other," can shape identity—of people and also of nations. And philology plays a dramatic role on discriminating between the memories that are allowed to belong to a nation's past and those that are not; between memories that are celebrated and memories that are repressed.

Considering the profession of the protagonist and narrator of the story, it is only logical that his account is rife with philological musings. Sörgel speculates about the probability of Chaucer having heard the Islamic(ate) story of Solomon's wondrous ring. The ring is mentioned by a character in the tale, an English Major who had heard about it in India. Legend has it, we are told, that the ring grants the ability to hear the language of the birds, and that it had once belonged to Solomon. The Major had seen a beggar with the ring in Punjab. The ring is so valuable that it cannot be sold. The Major speculates that the ring is lost. The philologist-narrator tells us that immediately after hearing about the ring, Thorpe mysteriously declares that he knows of things that are so invaluable that they cannot be sold. Afterwards, Thorpe offers Shakespeare's memory to him. The tale of the memory of Shakespeare, Thorpe says, "begins in

[188] "¿No basta un solo término repetido para desbaratar y confundir la serie del tiempo? ¿Los fervorosos que se entregan a una línea de Shakespeare no son, literalmente, Shakespeare?" ("Otras inquisiciones" 141). The essay is entitled "Nueva refutación del tiempo" ("A New Refutation of Time") and is published in *Other Inquisitions*.

the East" (510).[189] Borges's tale "Shakespeare's Memory" is thus presented as a rewriting of this originally Arabic tale. It is a new way of telling a story which starts in the East and which tells of an object of incalculable price.

With his mention of Chaucer's connection to this magic Eastern ring, the philologist-narrator is making a not-so-subtle allusion to Chaucer's more markedly Oriental story, the "Squire's Tale." The setting of this Chaucer tale is distinctively Eastern. The king of Tartary Genghis Khan ("Cambyuskan") celebrates a party where the ambassador of the king "of Arabe and of Inde" gives him four gifts: a flying mechanical brass steed, a magic mirror, a wondrous sword and, finally, the invaluable ring. In Chaucer's tale, the king of Tartary hands the magic ring to his daughter, the Princess Canacee. Due to the magical qualities of the ring, she is able to eavesdrop on a female falcon, who had been deserted by a male hawk, telling of her story of heartbreak. The ring is even explicitly associated with Solomon, just as in Borges's tale. In his comprehensive study of the sources and analogues of the "Squire's Tale," Vincent DiMarco explains that "Solomon's knowledge of animals and the natural world is declared in 1 Kings 4.33, while both the Aggadah and the Koran explicitly mention his knowledge of birds' speech" (197). It is therefore appropriate that the Major in Borges's story says that the tale of the ring is part of Islamic lore, and that Sörgel reasons that Chaucer must have heard of the story.

Drawing from this and other coincidences between Chaucer's tale and Arabic-speaking culture, several scholars argue that Chaucer derived the episode of Princess Canacee eavesdropping on the female falcon from a similar episode included in "The Tale of Taj al-Muluk and the Princess Dunya" in the *Nights*. They argue that Chaucer might have heard of the episode through his access to the same story that appears in *Pierre de Provence et la belle*

[189] "Empieza en el Oriente" (Borges, "La memoria" 430).

Maguelonne (1453) (Irwin 1739; Metlitzki 141; Bryan, Dempster and Brown 375-6). Borges was a medievalist and an English Literature Professor for twenty years. He was deeply familiarized with philological debates on Chaucer, as is confirmed in his *Introducción a la Literatura Inglesa* (*Introduction to English Literature*) (1965). Here Borges claims that in the *Canterbury Tales* "[t]here are contemporary English accounts, there are Flemish stories, there are classic tales; there is a story that also appears in the *Book of the Thousand and One Nights*" (Borges and Guerrero, "Libro de los seres imaginarios" 816).[190] Thus concludes the only paragraph dedicated to the *Canterbury Tales*, which gives no further detail as to which specific story Borges is referring. In "Shakespeare's Memory" we find a ratification that Borges is thinking of the "Squire's Tale."

In turn, "Shakespeare's Memory" twice mentions the influence that Chaucer exerted on Shakespeare. One of the very first memories that Sörgel recovers is one of Shakespeare singing Chaucer's "A.B.C." Later on, the story lists a series of authors, beginning with Chaucer, who influenced Shakespeare. The thread that Borges is creating starts with a medieval Arabic tale that is rewritten by Chaucer which influenced Shakespeare and which is again reshaped by Borges.

Upon close reading, the philological implications of the tale become clear. Numerous comments in the story point to the intricate nature of the relationship between memory and identity, and refer to both personal and national identity. The clarifications about personal memory are plentiful. Before transferring Shakespeare's memory, Thorpe says that he possesses two memories, or rather—he immediately corrects himself—two memories possess him. He is, at least partially, Shakespeare. Even his accent is affected, a phenomenon which Sörgel attributes to Thorpe's long stay in the East. Similarly, Sörgel also ends up being "owned" by two

[190] "[h]ay relatos ingleses contemporáneos, hay relatos flamencos, hay relatos clásicos; hay un relato que figura también en el *Libro de las Mil y Una Noches*" (Borges and Guerrero, "Libro de los seres imaginarios" 816).

memories. When Shakespeare's memory was offered to him, Sörgel was shocked. "I could not get a single word out. It was as though I had been offered the ocean" (510).[191] The metaphor of the water comes up later on in the story: "At first the waters of the two memories did not mix" (514).[192] However, "in time, the great torrent of Shakespeare threatened to flood my own modest stream—and very nearly did so" (514).[193] Sörgel reflects: "Since personal identity is based on memory, I feared for my sanity" (514).[194] He also highlights that some memories can be repressed: "Like our own, Shakespeare's memory included regions, broad regions, of shadow—regions that he willfully rejected" (513).[195] Comments about national identity also pervade the text.

Sörgel speculates that George Chapman (1559-1634)'s version of Homer had only taken the English language to its Anglo-Saxon origins—a comment that carries evident ideological connotations. Borges sets the tale in the 1920s, just after the Great War. The war is even evoked when we are told that Sörgel's brother had died in it. Nations, and wars fought between (fraternal) nations, like those between the Anglos and the Saxons, are very much a part of the fabric of the text. Borges obsessively emphasizes the similarities between German and English culture during a time in which such comparisons were not common. As pointed out in Chapter 1, he loved to remind his students of the Germanic origins of the familiar words "Thursday" and "Friday" (*Professor* 2). Throughout his life, Borges obsessively repeats that stringent forms of patriotisms are ridiculous and dangerous. Having lived through two world wars, having witnessed the Holocaust, and having been exposed to a philo-Nazi attitude in Argentina, Borges

[191] "No acerté a pronunciar una palabra. Fue como si me ofrecieran el mar" ("La memoria de Shakespeare" 430).
[192] "[a]l principio las memorias no mezclaban sus aguas" ("La memoria de Shakespeare" 434).
[193] "Con el tiempo el gran río de Shakespeare amenazó, y casi anegó, mi modesto caudal" ("La memoria de Shakespeare" 434).
[194] "Ya que la identidad personal se basa en la memoria, temí por mi razón" ("La memoria de Shakespeare" 434).
[195] "Como la nuestra, la memoria de Shakespeare incluía zonas, grandes zonas de sombra rechazadas voluntariamente por él" ("La memoria de Shakespeare" 433).

was convinced that fanatic forms of nationalism bred wars and conflict. The fact that he makes some of his more explicit comments about the topic in a tale told by a philologist is revealing. Borges is aware that philology does play a substantial role in setting the boundaries between European nations, but keeps insisting that these boundaries are and always were extremely porous.

"Shakespeare's Memory" includes some other revealing references to national literatures. We are told, for instance, that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) is the official religion of Germany and that Shakespeare is the religion of England. This is the same Shakespeare who is inspired by Chaucer, who is in turn inspired by a tale of the *Nights*. The memory of the *Nights* is thus woven into the official religion of England—whether the English are conscious of it or not, whether they celebrate that memory or whether they "willfully reject it." The resistance faced by the Arabic thesis could be considered a manifestation of this sort of willful rejection of certain memories. Throughout his works, as if he were a sort of psychoanalyst of philology, Borges insists in bringing this memory to light, or at least, in hinting at its existence.

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I mentioned before that one of the models proposed to illustrate how texts dialogue with each other is that of metempsychosis. I also mentioned some Borgesian water-metaphors: the "dross" of the Nile and the river of Shakespearean memory that almost take over the stream of Sörgel's memory. The most suggestive narrative technique, also suggested by Borges in "Shakespeare's Memory," is that of the palimpsest. The narrator observes: "De Quincey says that man's brain is a palimpsest. Every new text covers the previous one, and is in turn covered by the text that follows" (512).[196] Note the allusion to "texts" in a comment that describes the overlapping of

[196] "De Quincey afirma que el celebro de un hombre es un palimpsesto. Cada nueva escritura cubre la escritura anterior y es cubierta por la que sigue" ("La memoria de Shakespeare" 432).

personal memories. The observation could apply to both personal and national memories. National memories are created through all these texts, some of which are celebrated and some of which are pushed under the rug. The metaphor of the palimpsest is appropriate, considering that, as the narrator also observes, "memory is not a summation; it is a chaos of vague possibilities" (513).[197] Traditional forms of philology assume a summation in which one text is added to the other, in which they "influence" each other—in which time is linear. A positivistic mindset cannot deal with a world that is in "chaos." It cannot account for the circularity that is created when a man, by virtue of evoking Shakespeare, becomes Shakespeare. It cannot internalize that many writers create their own precursors. It attempts to order and classify with logical and casual links. And sometimes Borges does seem to reflect this outlook, as when he resolutely affirms that zajals influence Ruiz. But in other instances, as in "Shakespeare's Memory," "The Aleph" or "The Zahir," he simply suggests a chaos of vague possibilities.

In the palimpsest created through "Shakespeare Memory," the tale itself is presented as if it were a layer of writing covering—although not completely—an Arabic tale of an object so valuable that it cannot be sold. "Shakespeare's Memory" also exposes that Chaucer was "covering up" a story of the *Nights*, the one of the talking birds. Shakespeare is included in the palimpsest when the tale twice reminds readers that Chaucer influenced him. "The Aleph" and "The Zahir" are part of another fascinating palimpsest. They are both "covering" Dante. In turn, Dante is writing in the tradition of courtly love or, one may say, writing on top of it. The tradition of courtly love, the tales insinuate, could be considered to be a textual layer written over the Islamic cycle of the mirāj. Manrique's *Stanzas* form part of a palimpsest which connects them with tales from the *Nights* and with a eulogy authored by the medieval Andalusi poet Abu

[197] "memoria…no es una suma; es un desorden de posibilidades indefinidas" ("La memoria de Shakespeare" 433).

al-Baqa al-Rundi. Don Juan Manuel rewrites a *Nights*-like tale—and then Borges adds to this palimpsest by reshaping the story. The *Book of Good Love* is part of a palimpsest which includes the works of Ovid, Provençal troubadours and zajals. A humongous sea creature that probably originates in Islamic cosmology ends up in *Moby-Dick*. A Persian horse might have inspired Ariosto's hippogryph. The palimpsests can even include imaginary stories—narratives that perform the role of actual stories but which are actually created by the narrative that covers them. This is the sort of palimpsest which, Borges reminds his readers, was created by the *Quixote*. This novel concocts the Arabic tale over which it is written. All these palimpsests form part of Borges's new philology. Borges's enriching philological chaos of vague possibilities exposes the permeability of cultural, religious and regional boundaries. It even introduces cracks in the line separating fiction from reality.

PART 2: ARGENTINE MEDIEVALISMS

Chapter 4: Epic Tango

We do not expect to find insights about how Argentines position themselves vis-à-vis the West in academic discussions on epic poetry. Yet, the extremely influential scholar and poet Leopoldo Lugones, and many other twentieth-century Argentine intellectuals, inspired by the Romantic paradigm, believe that all respectable and heroic Western nations have epics. From this, they deduce that the lack of an epic is a sure sign of the absence of a heroic past and of "Western" qualities. To them, this means that they had to either unearth an epic written in their own nation or write one. Previous studies on Latin American approaches to the epic focus on the nineteenth century. Altschul conducts the most comprehensive analysis on the issue in her 2012 volume *Geographies of Philological Knowledge*. She examines how and why the Venezuelan legal scholar and grammarian Andrés Bello tries to find an epic poem written in Chile. She concludes that he is motivated by the then ubiquitous Romantic conviction that all reputable Western nations must have their own epic poem. The search for a Chilean epic thus reflects, according to Altschul, an attempt to define the newly-formed nation as Occidental. In this chapter, I shift the attention to the twentieth century to argue that at least one writer, Borges, exposes the limits of the Romantic paradigm as it relates to epics.[198]

[198] The methodology used to study Borges's attitude toward epics has so far consisted in zooming in on his approach to specific poems: *Beowulf*, *Poem of the Cid*, or *Martín Fierro*. The criticism of Borges's approach to these epics is deeply marked by two typical motifs in the comment of his works: that he turned his back on Argentina and that he was a man of the nineteenth century. In his 2011 book on Borges and Lugones, the influential Argentine critic Gaspar Pío del Corro condemns Borges's refusal to recognize the epic qualities of the *Martín Fierro*. He is especially disparaging of what he considers to be Borges's desublimation and denigration of the gaucho from a national epic hero to a defector and criminal (83). According to del Corro, the *Martín Fierro* is the response to the outdated and pro-imperial stance epitomized by Sarmiento's monumental *Civilización y Barbarie: La vida de Juan Facundo Quiroga: Aspectos físicos, costumbres y hábitos de la República Argentina* (*Civilization and Barbarism: The Life of Juan Facundo Quiroga: Physical Aspects, Customs and Habits of the Argentine Republic*) (1845). Borges's supposed rejection of the *Martín Fierro* would reflect his supposed imperialism and the fact that he is in line with Sarmiento and his division of the world into two categories: America as object-of-knowledge and Europe as subject-of-knowledge (350-2). In other words, according to del Corro, when given the option between a supposedly refuted and outdated theory (Sarmiento) and a supposedly new and correct one (Hernández, Lugones), Borges choses the old one. Borges's approach to the *Martín Fierro* has also been studied by Sarlo. According to her, Borges was trying to liberate the *Martín Fierro* "from the dead weight of Lugones's epic" (39). "Borges's Fierro is a

An original aspect of Borges's approach to the epic genre is his proposal that Argentines could find the raw material for their epic poem in tango lyrics. The first time that Borges presages that tango lyrics could over time develop into an epic poem is in his volume *Evaristo Carriego*, published in 1930. Borges clarifies that the lyrics that qualify to become part of an epic are not the sad and nostalgic ones, but those that could boast a "heroic tone" (161).[199] This particular tone, according to him, can "immediately transmit that joy of combat that Greek and Germanic poems, long ago, tried to express in words" (161).[200] The Greek poem is evidently the *Odyssey*; the Germanic one is *Beowulf*, mentioned in the previous paragraph as the Saxon poem that originates Germanic literatures. Borges then evokes the doubts that the German classicist Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1828) planted on Homer's identity. Countering the assumption that the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* had a single author, Wolf claimed that there was never an individual "Homer" and that these long poems combined collective short songs. In Europe, his theory was used to support the Romantic idea that medieval epics are, deep down, a product of the collective spirit of the Volk. As Altschul explains, "once the theory was established for 'Homer,' the father of poetry, it was possible to transpose it to other, long, heroic verse narratives, including long poems of the Middle Ages" (*Geographies* 89). In Latin America, Borges decides to transpose it to a potential epic poem weaved out of tango short songs. "As is known," he says, during the eighteenth century Wolf "wrote that the *Iliad* was a series of songs and rhapsodies before it became an epic; this knowledge may allow for the prophesy that, in time, tango lyrics will form a

sober man who respects his destiny…not a hero, but a man profoundly embedded in the primitive culture of the plains" (41). This position sees Borges as overcoming an outdated model (Lugones) and that does not see Borges as endorsing imperialism. This reasoning is closer with the reading proposed in this chapter. In the body of the chapter I show how the idea of Borges as a nineteenth-century man is also visible in the criticism of his approach to *Beowulf*.

[199] "tono valiente" (Borges, "Evaristo" 161).

[200] "suele directamente transmitir esa belicosa alegría cuya expresión verbal ensayaron, en edades remotas, rapsodas griegos y germánicos" (Borges, "Evaristo" 161).

long civic poem, or will suggest to an ambitious bard the writing of such poem" (164).[201] The supposed epic hero of this potential epic poem would be a *compadre* or *compadrito*, or riverside roughneck.

In his poems "El Compadre" ("The *Compadre*") and "El tango" ("The Tango") Borges celebrates this particular figure, the *compadre*. "The *Compadre*" was first published in 1943 and "The Tango" in 1958. The last stanza of "The *Compadre*" associates him to the epic genre:

> The verses cease. The epic continues
> In Gerli, in Rosario, in Ciudadela.
> The criminal records include the portrait
> Of a mourner with a slant look.
> The silent blood of the Native
> Lingers in him. He prefers irony
> To insult, resentment to hope.
> The nights of the dock and the hollow,
> The dawns that desolate and denigrate,
> They'll see him stalking, sex and knife. (Borges and Bullrich 42)[202]

The *compadre* may no longer recite his verses but, Borges tells us, the "epic continues." Borges reflects a similar sentiment in his poem "The Tango," where we are told that the *compadritos* passed away—a long time ago, it is implied—but that they still live because, unknowingly, they had created an episode of an epic poem. "The Tango" is composed of fifteen stanzas of four verses each. It opens with the question "Where would they be?" and the rest of the poem is dedicated to reiterating the question and providing possible answers ("El Otro" 266).[203] The poetic voice of "The Tango" wonders:

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[201] "Es sabido que…escribió que la *Ilíada*, antes de ser una epopeya, fue una serie de cantos y rapsodias; ello permite, acaso, la profecía de que las letras de tango formarán, con el tiempo, un largo poema civil, o sugerirán a algún ambicioso la escritura de ese poema" (Borges, "Evaristo" 164).

[202] "Cesan los versos. La epopeya sigue / En Gerli, en el Rosario, en Ciudadela. / Los prontuarios registran el retrato / De un enlutado de mirada aviesa. / La sangre silenciosa del indígena / Perdura en él. Prefiere la ironía / Al insulto, el rencor a la esperanza. / Las noches de la dársena y del hueco, / Las albas que desolan y denigran, / Lo verán acechar, sexo y cuchillo" (Borges and Bullrich 42). The poem "The Compadre" can also be found in Borges, *Textos recobrados: 1931-955* 178.

[203] "¿Dónde estarán?" ("El Otro" 266).

Where are those who passed,
Leaving an episode to the epic,
A fable to time, and who without hate,
Profit or passion of love were stabbed?
…
A mythology of daggers
is slowly lost to oblivion;
A *chanson de geste* is lost
In sordid police news. ("El Otro" 266)[204]

Instead of wondering where ancient Oriental or Spanish dynasties are, as Abu al-Baqa' al-Rundi and Manrique had done, Borges wonders where the *compadritos* are, and once again he suggests that one of them could be Argentina's epic hero. We thus have texts written during the thirties, forties and fifties in which Borges insists with his curious proposal—a proposal that failed.

Argentine intellectuals of the time do not find any epic hero among the urban *compadritos*. Instead, the book that most of them elevate to the rank of Argentina's epic, *El gaucho Martín Fierro* (*Martín Fierro*) (1872) by José Hernández (1884-1886), recounts the adventures and misfortunes of a rural "gaucho." *Martín Fierro* became Argentina's national epic after Borges's prestigious rival Lugones proposed it in a series of 1916 lectures delivered to celebrate the first century of Argentine independence.[205] The talks were published in a book, which became one of the more influential ones ever published in Argentina, *El Payador* (*The Gaucho Singer*). Lugones claims that like other cultures born from Greek and Latin roots, Argentina too had troubadours: the *payadores* (14-5). The *payador* can be roughly defined as a gaucho bard from the Argentine rural plains who, accompanied by a guitar, improvises a musical dialogue. These Latin American and post-medieval troubadours had crafted a particularly

[204] "¿Dónde estarán aquellos que pasaron, / dejando a la epopeya un episodio, / una fábula al tiempo, y que sin odio, / lucro o pasión de amor se acuchillaron? / ... / Una mitología de puñales / lentamente se anula en el olvido; / una canción de gesta se ha perdido / en sórdidas noticias policiales" ("El Otro" 266).
[205] Borges's attitude toward Lugones was not exempt from a certain anxiety *à la* Bloom, and countering Lugones's views about the epic was one of the many ways in which Borges distanced himself from the then most prestigious figure of the Argentine cultural world. On the relationship between Borges and Lugones, see: Corro, Bordelois and Sarlo 20-49.

Argentine language that was in turn crystallized in the *Martín Fierro*. That is to say, Argentina may lack a medieval period, but this detail does not impede it from having everything that this particular era had supposedly granted to respected European countries: an oral poetry from the Volk, crafter of the national language that, in time, evolves into a proper epic.

The wonderful news about simultaneously belonging to the West and to an epic culture was received with delight by the Argentine elite, who hastily elevated *Martín Fierro* to the prestigious position of *the* national book. A gaucho may seem like an unlikely choice for epic hero—why would the intellectual, economic and political elite choose to revere an outlaw? Part of the reason for this peculiar choice is that by the turn of the century any real political threat posed by gauchos had been dismantled. Only when gauchos were part of the past could the elite appropriate this already popular figure for nationalistic purposes. Gauchos could even function as a divider between "genuine" Argentines and the new immigrants who lacked "truly Argentine" rural ties.

The canonization of Fierro the gaucho was so successful that during Borges's lifetime many Argentines compared the *Martín Fierro* to European *chansons de geste* and even referred to it as "our Bible" (Borges and Ferrari 205). Today, a century after Lugones's proposal, it is still common for children in Argentina's elementary schools to dress as gauchos on national holidays and in high schools, the *Martín Fierro* is an unavoidable assigned reading. This could not have happened before Lugones's elevation of the poem to the rank of national epic, when the higher social classes usually belittled the gaucho as a marginal and despicable figure. Without Lugones, academic writings about the *Martín Fierro* would also look very different. The characterization of the *Martín Fierro* as an epic is still commonplace in textbooks and in academic writings (see, e.g., Corro 350; González Echevarría 22). According to González Echevarría, "Romantic

ideology created the medieval epic monuments that presumably stand at the beginning of European national languages and literatures (*Poema del Mío Cid, Chanson de Roland*), and Hernández endowed Argentine and Latin American Literature with a modern epic of its own" (22). Hernández, in other words, is Argentina's modern Homer.

Like gauchos, *compadritos* are virile figures, usually in a complicated relationship with the law, and their time of their apogee is always in an indeterminate and unrecoverable past. These coincidences explain why the Argentine imagery frequently associates them to each other (Borges and Guerrero, "El 'Martín Fierro'" 513). There are, however, at least two differences between them. One of them is the stage on which they perform. While the gaucho acts in the rural Argentine plains or "Pampas," the *compadrito* usually carries out his heroic deeds in the modest neighborhoods located in between the urban and sophisticated Buenos Aires and the Pampas. The other key difference between the gaucho and the *compadrito* is the literary form associated with them. The gaucho is the protagonist of the gaucho cycle with the *Martín Fierro* standing as the epitome of the genre. An iconic image of the gaucho is that of him with his guitar, surrounded by other gauchos, singing about his pains and struggles. Gauchoesque literature purports to be inspired by these rural songs. By contrast, the "poetry" typically associated with the *compadrito* is that of tango songs or *milongas*.

A significant implication of both Lugones's and Borges's proposals is that by positing that a national epic could hypothetically exist after the Middle Ages, they are countering a then commanding force in literary studies, which posits that these sorts of poems are by definition medieval. The association of the genre with the ten-century-long period which we call the Middle Ages is so deep that, according to classical rules, the end of this particular era results in the demise of the national epic. After the Middle Ages, only literary epics created by individual

poets instead of the Volk of nations could exist. The year 1492 thus marks yet another threshold: European "primitivism" and national epics on one side, and modernity and, say, novels and literary epics, on the other. Under classical rules, Latin Americans "could write a secondary or artistic epic, but they were too removed temporally from 'primitive times' to write a true national epic like Homer's *Odyssey* or Spain's *Poem of the Cid*" (Altschul 154). In Borges's day this opinion was held by, for instance, Américo Castro. "I was always puzzled," Castro tells us, "by the usual comparison between the *Martín Fierro* and the *chansons de geste* of medieval Europe, which are the result of a state of civilization that was never again reproduced, and with which the nineteenth century of the River Plate region has nothing to do" (*La peculiaridad* 76).[206] Castro's expression of surprise is included in a book about the Spanish spoken in Buenos Aires: *La peculiaridad lingüística rioplatense y su sentido histórico* (*The Linguistic Peculiarity of the River Plate and its Historical Significance*) (hereinafter, *The Linguistic Peculiarity*) (1941, revised 1960). The volume motivates Borges to write one of his more scathing attacks.

The comment, "Doctor Américo Castro is Alarmed," omits the issue of the epic genre, but it makes clear that Borges staunchly opposes the basic premise of the book: that the Spanish spoken in Castile is the only correct one, and that it should serve as a model for the Spanish spoken elsewhere. This reasoning responds to the logic of imperialism: Latin Americans were obligated to belong to the Spanish-speaking world—but perfect Spanish, to them, would always be out of reach. Castro's reasoning thus reminds us of those situations identified by Homi Bhabha in which colonials are put in a position of "being almost the same but not quite" (86). It

[206] "Siempre me dejó perplejo la comparación usual entre el *Martín Fierro* y las gestas poéticas de la Europa medieval, fruto de un estado de civilización que nunca más se ha reproducido, y con el cual el siglo XIX rioplatense nada en absoluto tiene que ver" (Castro, *La peculiaridad* 76).

was the "same" language but not same enough to allow its speakers to emancipate themselves from the tutelage of Castilian-speaking peoples from Spain.

Because of this positioning of Spain in a tutelary role over the Spanish-speaking world, Castro's volume is one of the purer examples of *hispanismo*. *Hispanismo* is the concept which propounds that Spain is the heart and soul of the Spanish-speaking world and that, even if Latin American countries declared their independence, Spain still bears the responsibility to protect and celebrate the supposedly genuine Hispanic spirit allegedly under attack by "foreign" influences. *Hispanismo* was especially powerful during the first half of the twentieth century, and many Latin Americanists perceive that it is still influential today (Gómez López-Quiñones, "Borges" 159; Altschul, *Geographies* 141). Castro's call to the strict applicability of classical rules is yet another way to reinforce his marked *hispanismo*: Argentines speak the same language, but not the same as the perfect Castilian one; Argentines can have poems, but not of the same rank as the Spanish ones.

Borges's and Lugones's adoption of a broad definition of the national epic genre allows them to challenge the *hispanista* veto on national epics for nations outside of Europe. By adopting this broadened definition, they are standing on the shoulders of some prominent Latin American intellectuals who had also expanded the definition of the national epic so as to allow post-medieval poems to fit into this category. Among them, Bello stands out. His works exert a dramatic influence on Latin America, and on Borges. During his youth, Borges had even used the spelling proposed by Bello; so did some of his characters. The spelling used by the protagonist of the tale "Funes, el memorioso" ("Funes, His Memory") (1944) "was the type recommended by Andrés Bello: *i* for *y*, *j* for *g*" (*Collected Fictions* 133).[207] Besides suggesting

[207] "la ortografía, del tipo que Andrés Bello preconizó: *i* por *y*, *j* por *g*" (Borges, "Ficciones" 487).

this specific spelling for Latin Americans, Bello was the one who proposed a broadened definition for the epic genre—which, not incidentally, would also allow Chile to have an epic poem and a heroic past (Altschul, *Geographies* 4). Altschul explains that in Latin America, "a vital pronouncement associated with the epic was Bello's identification of *La Araucana* (*The Araucana*) (1569-89), Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga [(1533-1594)]'s poem about the Spanish conquest of the native Mapuche, as an epic text" (*Geographies* 146-7). Altschul postulates that in endorsing the idea that all respectable Western nations needed an epic, Bello's project was an Occidentalist one, that is, one that reflects the understanding of America as an extension of the European continent. She cites Walter Mignolo, who explains that unlike Asia and Africa, America "was never Europe's Other but the difference within sameness: Indias Occidentales…and later America" were "the extreme West" (*Local Histories/Global Designs* 58). Because of his Occidentalism, Altschul identifies Bello's attitude to the epic genre as an instance of internalization of coloniality (155). Bello tries to strengthen the links of Chile to the "West" and he even buys into some of the Romantic rules that the selective cluster of nations imposed, including the one that indicates that having an epic is essential. At the same time, however, his redefinition of the genre in a way that would allow a non-European nation like Chile to have a respectable epic implies a form of what Altschul calls "Occidentalist resistance." Specifically, Bello is resisting the classical rules of the genre that in practice deny new American nations the possibility to have their own "legitimate epics" (154).

Bello's proposal to use an epic to attach a Latin American nation from the "extreme West" to the proper West continues to reverberate during the twentieth century. Lugones's undeniably popular arguments about the Argentine epic are inspired by Bello's reflections about Chile's. Like Bello, Lugones sees the need for a Latin American country to have a proper epic so

as to attach the nation to the Occident. In this particular aspect, Lugones's approach to the epic genre, like Bello's, could be inscribed in the Latin American tradition of Occidentalist resistances.

A superficial reading of some of Borges's poems could also give us the impression that he feels the need for an epic poem. The poetic voice of "The Tango" laments that in Argentina heroic deeds have not transpired in an epic poem but rather in sordid newspaper articles. He claims that an Argentine *chanson de geste* is "lost" in "sordid police news" ("El Otro" 266).[208] We can detect the patriotism underlying his pain—every time a potential epic hero becomes the subject of a newspaper article instead of being properly celebrated in a reputable epic poem, Argentina's chance to become an epic nation is lost. If we take this longing at face value, we have no option but to deduce that the poetic voice is a serious practitioner of the "cult of courage," as Borges names it. The voice yearns to live in a Romantic world in which courage is properly celebrated through an epic poem. Taking the protest literally could also lead us to believe that the voice of the poem is adhering to the mandate, inherited from the Romantic paradigm, that respectable Western nations should aspire to have their own epic poems. The lack of a single text in this specific genre and the disappointment it causes can only surface when we take this Romantic rule of mandatory epics for granted. Only then we would detect a "lack" of epic poems, and only then would this absence become the source of anguish and pain. The poem, however, ends by clarifying that the *compadritos* delineate a fictional past. This is a significant departure from the Romantic paradigm. When we examine other comments by Borges on the epic we can perceive an attempt to overcome Occidentalism and to reflect what Mignolo calls "post-Occidentalism"—however, as we shall see, his attempts were not always felicitous.

[208] "una canción de gesta se ha perdido / En sórdidas noticias policiales" (Borges, "El otro" 266).

Borges reveals his awareness of the role that epics had played in the scholarship that attempted to bridge Latin American nations with the "West" when he ridicules the Occidentalism of Lugones's *Martín Fierro*: "Lugones demands the epic appellation for the *Martín Fierro*; its writing would prove our Greco-Roman descent despite the long break brought upon by Christianity, which is an 'Oriental religion'" (Borges and Guerrero, "El 'Martín Fierro'" 559).[209] Bello had tried to attach Chile to the West via a European (non-Oriental) Spain and via Greece and Rome. Lugones had tried to attach Argentina to the West via Greece and Rome, too. Borges reminds them that Greece and Rome were not so "Occidental." Questioning whether Greece and Rome belong to the West is an exercise in futility; the whole idea of the West falls apart the second the question is seriously considered. Borges's exposure of the Occidentalism underlying Lugones's project insinuates that Borges's approach to the epic genre is, in general, a post-Occidentalist one.

The main evidence that Borges's outlook is, in many ways, post-Occidentalist is that Borges sees no lack. Rather, he repeatedly—and even obsessively—dismisses the idea that all nations must be founded in a book. In one of his last interviews an octogenarian Borges would attribute Lugones's nationalistic view of the *Martín Fierro* to an

> idea, that to me is superstitious, that every country must have its holy book. Then, he [Lugones] thought that that book, that Koran, that Bible, could be the *Martín Fierro*. How strange; I have heard people that, for instance, talking to foreign men of letters, have given them an exemplar of the *Martín Fierro* telling them: 'This is our Bible'—which is weird, right? However, it is accepted. (Borges and Ferrari 205)[210]

[209] "Lugones exige para el *Martín Fierro* el nombre de epopeya; su escritura probaría nuestra ascendencia grecolatina a pesar de la larga interrupción que obró el cristianismo, que es una 'religión oriental'" (Borges and Guerrero, "El "Martín Fierro"" 559).

[210] "idea, que para mí es supersticiosa, de que cada país debe tener su libro sagrado. Entonces a él [Lugones] se le ocurrió que ese libro, ese Corán, digamos, esa Biblia, podía ser el *Martín Fierro*. Qué raro, yo he oído a gente que, por ejemplo, conversando con literatos extranjeros, les han dado un ejemplar del *Martín Fierro*, y les han dicho: 'Es nuestra Biblia.' Lo cual parece rarísimo, ¿no? Sin embargo, se acepta." (Borges and Ferrari 205).

Undermining the assumption that every nation must necessarily have a book is one of Borges's lifelong obsessions. One of the multitude of ways in which he counters this widespread supposition is by exposing its historicity and, thus, its constructedness.

This historicity is implied in the volume *El "Martín Fierro"* (*The "Martín Fierro"*) (1953), published three decades before the interview. In it Borges assigns a religious origin to the idea that a group of peoples could be associated to a particular book—thus, Borges says, the Koran calls Jews "the peoples of the Book" and Hindus believe that the *Veda* is eternal and divine (559). Borges continues to explain that "[f]rom the concept of a religious canonical book is derived...the one of national canonical books" (559).[211] This metamorphosis from God to nation is especially promoted by the Romantic movement.

Epics as Artificial Ruins

Borges elaborates on this process of conflation between the epic genre and the respectable, Western nation in a revealing 1966 lecture. Meant as an introduction to Romanticism for Argentine college students, the talk is a concise and effective critique of the idea of epic nationalism. In it, Professor Borges turns our attention to two works authored by Macpherson, an eighteenth-century Scottish poet. One of them, first published in 1760, is entitled *Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland, translated from the Gaelic or Erse Language by James Macpherson* (*Fragments*); the other one is *Fingal: Ancient Epic Poem in Six Books* (*Fingal*), published two years later. Borges explains that the fact that the songs of the *Fragments* "were of an epic nature" was critical to their enthusiastic reception (*Professor* 103).[212] He explains that "[i]n the eighteenth century, and for many centuries, it was thought that

[211] "Del concepto de libro canónico religioso se pasó…al de libros canónicos nacionales" (Borges and Guerrero, "El "Martín Fierro"" 559).
[212] "tenían un carácter épico" (Borges, Arias, y Hadis 161).

Homer was indisputably the greatest of all poets. In spite of what Aristotle said, the literary genre of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* became the superior genre. That is, an epic poet was inevitably considered superior to a lyric or elegiac poet" (*Professor* 102-3).[213] Borges expounds on the Romantic veneration of the epic in his volume on the *Martín Fierro*:

> For the Greeks the greatest poet was Homer; the veneration which he inspired will spread to the *genre* to which his works belonged, and so the secular cult of the epic was born; this cult would fill Italy with artificial epics and, during the eighteenth century, it would induce Voltaire to manufacture the *Henriade* [(1723)], so that French literature could have its epic... But Aristotle had ruled that a tragedy can outdo an epic in brevity, in unity and in eloquence. (563; the Italics are in the original)[214]

When Borges refers to the French or Italian need for an epic, he alludes to a bizarre philological competition which takes place in the nineteenth century between those nations that had epics and the supposed privilege of belonging to an "epic" culture, and those that lacked one. This competition was spurred by the publication of *Fingal*; it is therefore appropriate that Borges discusses the concept of national epics in a lecture on this particular poem.

Joep Leerssen elaborates on the dramatic role that *Fingal* played in stimulating the "finding" of European Homers in his article "Ossian and the Rise of Literary Historicism" (2004). Nowadays it is customary for us to pinpoint the canonical origin of most European literatures in different epics: the *Beowulf* for English, the *Chanson de Roland* for French and the *Poem of the Cid* for Spanish. This approach, which today is regarded as commonsensical, did not exist in Macpherson's day. In Europe, Leerssen explains, "until 1760, all known epics had

[213] "[e]n el siglo XVIII, y durante muchos siglos, se había pensado que Homero era indiscutiblemente el más grande de los poetas. Y a pesar de lo que dijo Aristóteles, se llegó a creer que el género literario de la *Iliada* y la *Odisea* era el género superior. Es decir que un poeta épico era inevitablemente superior que un poeta lírico o un poeta elegíaco" (Borges, Arias, y Hadis 161).

[214] "Para los griegos el mayor poeta era Homero; la veneración que le tributaban se extendió al *género* a que pertenecían sus obras y surgió así el culto secular de la épica, que llenaría a Italia de epopeyas artificiales e induciría, en el siglo XVIII, a Voltaire a fabricar la *Henriade*, para que no le faltara una epopeya a la literatura francesa… Pero ya Aristóteles había sentenciado que la tragedia puede aventajar a la épica en brevedad, en unidad y en perspecuidad" (Borges and Guerrero, "El "Martín Fierro"" 563).

belonged to an undifferentiated 'world literature'" (124). He explains how up to the end of the eighteenth century

> Homer, Cicero, Dante, Tasso, Milton, Pope or Voltaire are seen, not as stages in a historical progress but rather as citizens in a timeless Republic of Canonicity, all simultaneously available to the present day reader, and therefore all, simultaneously, our virtual contemporaries. In the words of Jorge Luis Borges: "According to the classical view, the plurality of men and of periods is accidental; literature is always in the singular." (110)[215]

Leerssen continues to explain that this view of the epic determined that "[n]o one in 1770 had heard of *Beowulf*; the *Chanson de Roland* was gathering dust, unread…; and…the *Nibelungenlied* was obscure and marginal in German literature" (114). It was after the publication of *Fingal* that the first editions of these foundational epics appear: the first edition of *Beowulf* is from 1779, and the first edition of the *Nibelungenlied* is from 1782 (although the first "proper" edition is from 1826). We can thus see how reading of the existence of a medieval epic as a sure sign of a heroic past was born during the eighteenth century in certain Northern European nations that thought of themselves as having proper epics. Many scholars from these nations belittled other nations as being unepic because they lacked a poem written during the Middle Ages that belonged to this specific genre.

During the nineteenth century numerous English academics staunchly dismissed the idea of Scotland having its own epic and, according to Borges, the fact that they are English had a lot to do with it (*Professor* 105). But Scotland was not alone in its supposed unepicness. France was considered unepic at least until the publication of the first edition of the *Chanson de Roland* in 1837, which was considered groundbreaking. The French could finally refute their northern neighbors. Michelle Warren writes: "Reacting to German dominance in both military and textual

[215] "Para el concepto clásico, la pluralidad de los hombres y de los tiempos es accesoria, la literatura es siempre una sola" (Borges, "Discusión" 219).

matters French academics worked on securing the *Roland*'s identity as a French text—proof of the ancient immutability and superiority of the French feeling" ("Medievalism" 290). This superiority was especially clear, according to many French philologists, when they compared themselves to their Southern neighbor. Just as certain German intellectuals were fond of disparaging France's supposed unepicness, many French intellectuals seemed to have been pleased to remind their readers that Spain was a fundamentally unepic culture.[216] Spain was considered unepic until the very end of the nineteenth century. Even though there were earlier versions of the *Poem of the Cid*, the one that became canonical, and that could finally convince (most) philologists that Spain did have an epic, was an edition of 1898 (Altschul, *Geographies* 115-25).

The competition of epic versus unepic nations crossed the Atlantic. Bello was delighted to find out that Chile was the only American nation with a proper epic poem—Lugones's postulating of the *Martín Fierro* as Argentina's national epic was not unrelated to this fact (Altschul, *Geographies* 155). Borges's sardonic comments about the futility of this epic competition illustrate that to him there is absolutely no need to participate in it. In his opinion, the Romantic idea about the national epic, although widespread, is curious and outdated. It seems that, at least in this particular aspect, the Argentine poet is not thinking within an Occidentalist frame of mind.

Returning to Macpherson, Borges explains in his lecture that it was because of this ill-advised admiration for the epic genre that Edinburgh's men of letters were deeply impressed with the *Fragments*. Because the *Fragments* were heroic in character and thus echoed epics, it

[216] Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, French commentators would "often cite ruefully M. de Malezieu's eighteenth century conclusion: 'The French don't have an epic mindset'" (Warren 290). A characteristic representative of the tendency to see Spain as unepic is demonstrated in the prestigious French medievalist Gaston Paris (1839-1903) (*Geographies* 93-4).

"allowed them to entertain the possibility that an ancient epic poem existed which would give Scotland literary supremacy over England and above all the other modern regions of Europe" (*Professor* 103).[217] They offered Macpherson a "kind of stipend that would allow him to travel through the mountains of Scotland and collect ancient manuscripts" (103).[218] Macpherson accepted the challenge and a little more than a year later he published *Fingal* (104). *Fingal* is attributed to Fingal's blind son Ossian, who is presented as if he were singing from his father's crumbling castle. "*Fingal* (1762) and *Temora* (1763) both use the [epic] appellation in their subtitle" (Leerssen 112)—this is how the *Fragments* became epic poems.

Several of Borges's observations hint that *Fingal* was not, as Macpherson and the Romantic paradigm would suggest, an actual and spontaneous reflection of the spirit of Scottish (medieval) rural peoples; instead, the poem was as "artificial" as any other. Borges highlights this artificiality by reminding his students that Macpherson's supposed translations, when judged by modern standards, were very loose and necessitated him to fill gaps with poetry of his own invention. There were aesthetic choices involved in his project. Macpherson "could have done a rhymed version, but fortunately he chose a rhythmic form based on the verses of the Bible, especially the Psalms" (*Professor* 103-4).[219] This choice of style would not have been available had the poem been an actual product of the Scottish soil; the fact that Macpherson is inspired by Psalms evinces a "foreign" influence. Furthermore, Borges is careful to underscore the nationalistic nature of Macpherson's epic project. Macpherson crafted a nationalistic "Scottish"

[217] "los dejó entrever que existiera la posibilidad de una antigua epopeya, y esto daría a Escocia una primacía literaria sobre Inglaterra y sobre todas las naciones modernas de Europa" (Borges, Arias, y Hadis 162).
[218] "una suerte de beca…para que recorriera las serranías de Escocia y recogiera antiguos manuscritos" (Borges, Arias, y Hadis 162).
[219] "hubiera podido hacer una traducción rimada, pero felizmente eligió una forma rítmica, basada en los versículos de la biblia, sobre todo los salmos" (Borges, Arias, y Hadis 163).

book: “he did not want the characters to be Irish” and it had the specific purpose of giving Scotland literary preeminence over other nations, especially England (104).[220]

It is revealing that Borges concludes his disquisitions on Macpherson’s epic by citing the German philosopher of history Oswald Spengler (1880-1936).[221] In his magnum opus *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*) (1918-22), Spengler suggests that the eighteenth century was the first one to witness “artificial ruins;” Borges claims that “one of these artificial ruins is *Fingal*” (104).[222] Spengler does affirm that it was during that particular century that Western poets had introduced into their “stock of motives perhaps the most astonishing bizarrerie ever perpetrated, the *artificial ruin*” (5142). Artificial ruins were constructed “in order to deepen the historical character of the landscape” (5142). The need to develop a profound history for a specific place responds, according to Spengler, to the characteristically Western “wistful regard…for ruins and evidences of the distant past, its proneness to the collection of antiquities and manuscripts and coins, to pilgrimages to the Forum Romanum and to Pompeii, to excavations and philological studies” (5129). Having been a close reader of Spengler, this idea of the artificiality which is involved in the philological construction of past textual ruins is central to Borges’s idea of the epic genre, and also, more generally, of the Middle Ages. The citation of Spengler, the challenger of all historical canons, in the context of a lecture on the European Romantic idea of the epic “medieval” genre, is a gesture that confirms that Borges was proposing that we distance ourselves from Romantic and Occidentalist outlooks.

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[220] “no quería que los personajes fueran irlandeses” (Borges, Arias, y Hadis 163).

[221] When published in Germany in 1918, *The Decline of the West* became a wild success, and translations were soon circulating in Europe, United States, and Latin America. Spengler’s influence was so vast that in his essay “Spengler Revisited” (1974), the Canadian literary theorist Northrop Frye (1912-1991) claims that “we are all Spenglerians” (305). Frye explains that being “Spenglerian” does not mean to agree with all of Spengler’s theories, but to have been deeply influenced by them. Frye argues that while every single element of Spengler’s ideas has been refuted a dozen times, the leading ideas of *The Decline of the West* are “as much part of our mental outlook today as the electron or the dinosaur” (305). Borges is definitively Spenglerian in Frye’s sense of the term.

[222] “una de esas ruinas artificiales fue el Fingal” (Borges, Arias, y Hadis 163).

Spengler even challenges the very idea of the Middle Ages. The whole point of *The Decline of the West* is to propose an alternative to the traditional subdivision of history into Ancient, Medieval, and Modern. Spengler disparages this entrenched temporal taxonomy as an "incredibly jejune and meaningless scheme" born out the lack of "modesty" on part of the European West (426-44). He says that the application of this temporal model to the whole world—in the writing of world histories, for instance—involves a ridiculous exaggeration of the relative importance of this "little" part of the world which had "developed on West European soil" (426). Spengler denounces: "We select a single bit of ground as the natural center of the historical system, and make it the central sun" (438). According to Spengler, the "Middle Ages connotes the history of the space-time region in which *Latin was the language of the Church and the learned*" (8647; the Italics are in the original). This gesture, according to Spengler, implies ignoring "[t]he mighty course of Eastern Christianity, which, long before Boniface, spread over Turkestan into China and through Sabaea into Abyssinia" (8647), but also the art of India and East Asia (4482) and the history of "Arabian culture" (1577). That history, according to Spengler, was "smothered under the surface forms of the Roman Empire and the 'Middle Ages'" (1577). To put it in the terms coined by Mignolo, Spengler had detected that by creating supposedly "universal" histories based on the local, European division of time into Antiquity, Middle Ages, and Modernity, a design born out of the "local history" of Europe was imposed as a "global design" for the rest of the world.

Mignolo explicates: "Western civilization has constructed its own history, has assumed that the history of the planet was its property too and that it was the point of arrival in an ascending history of the human species…there were histories of other civilizations, coexisting with the Western one, relegated to the past of world history" (*Local Histories/Global Designs*

ix). The classical rules about the epic are paradigmatic of a global design product of a local history: through imperialist discourses, certain nations from Northern Europe establish that many other nations should aspire to be as "Western" as them. These rules also specify that to be a high-standing member of the West, one should have an epic and that to have an epic, one should have a Middle Ages. Yet the Middle Ages is a historical era which could only exist, by definition, in some European countries. Thus, according to this logic, countries outside of England, Germany or France are invited to admire the values of the West and even to attempt to belong to it, but always in a peripheral, accessory way. They would be almost the same, but not quite.

Spengler also challenges the notion, inherited from the Romantic paradigm, that the epic is a manifestation of the spirit of the people. The German thinker reminds his readers that "[w]hen we speak of the great epic poets, the Skalds, the Troubadours, as creators of language, we must not forget that they began by being trained for the task, *in language as in other things*, by moving in noble circles" (12841; the Italics are in the original). Similarly, according to Borges, *Beowulf* is not a plain transcription of Old English primitive songs, *Fingal* is not a simple translation into English of the Gaelic songs of ancient Scottish rural peoples, and *Martín Fierro* is not actually authored by gauchos (*Professor* 8-10, 104-7; Borges and Guerrero, "El 'Martín Fierro'" 515). In the Romantic tradition, this would imply that they were born spontaneously out of the English, Scottish, or Argentine soil, uncontaminated by foreign influences and even by the higher classes; it would indicate that they were ruins born out of the genuine spirit of the national peoples. Borges instead mentions that *Beowulf* was authored by an erudite Christian monk who had read the *Aeneid*, that Macpherson's project was financed by the Scottish elite, and that the gauchoesque one was a genre as artificial as any other, actually born out of the pens of educated city people (*Professor* 8-10, 104-7; Borges and Guerrero, "El 'Martín

Fierro'" 515). The authors of *Beowulf*, *Fingal*, and *Martín Fierro* were moving, as Spengler would say, in "noble circles."

Just as Borges attributes the need to create a Scottish epic to the misguided notion that this genre is superior to all others, he attributes the need to see an epic in *Martín Fierro* to the same "old and damaging superstition" (Borges and Guerrero, "El "Martín Fierro"" 562).[223] Just as he highlights "foreign" influences on *Fingal*, he suggests the equally foreign provenance of the gaucho cycle that, according to him, was born in Uruguay (Borges and Guerrero, "El 'Martín Fierro'" 516). At a time in which some cling to the illusion of a legitimate, real cradle for their nations, Borges challenges that such cradles ever existed on any side of the Atlantic. The poems fondly regarded as ruins of a local long-lost tradition are artificial ruins—not that Borges would ever provide any example of a "real" ruin either.

Affirming that one does not actually need an epic poem, and exposing the historicity of this need, is the only way out from the Occidentalist and *hispanista* logic which defines that Latin American nations should aspire to belong to the West and to the Hispanic world but that simultaneously defines Westernness and Hispanicity in such a way that Latin American nations are doomed to always be second-class members.

Spain's Artificial Ruin: The "Rude" *Poem of the Cid*

Borges also exposes the flaws and risks of *hispanista* and nationalistic approaches to philology when he comments on the *Poem of the Cid*.[224] Specifically, the Argentine writer counters three ideas about the *Cid* frequently shared by *hispanista* philologists of his time. The first one is that

[223] "vieja y dañina superstición" (Borges and Guerrero, "El "Martín Fierro"" 562).
[224] Gaston, like Borges and Bello, posits the French *Roland* as the model for a heroic epic. Borges's derision of the *Poem of the Cid* results from a combination of several factors. One of them is that he could be echoing Gaston-like scholars.

because Latin America is a mere continuation of Spain, Latin Americans should be eager to adopt the *Poem of the Cid* as their own. The second one is that the *Poem of the Cid* was composed before the *Chanson de Roland*. The third one is related to the right-wing appropriation of the *Poem of the Cid* as anti-Semitic.

The idea of the *Poem of the Cid* as a foundational work not only for Spain but also for Latin America can be seen in the writings of Pedro Grases (1909-2004). Grases was, like Castro, a political émigré who had been forced to cross the Atlantic after the Civil War of 1936-39. He moved to Venezuela and became a central authority on Bello. According to his 1954 book on the epic, in Bello's writings:

> the new peoples…were invited to consider all creations pertaining to the Castilian language as their own. From here stems the symbolic value of his works on the *Poem of the Cid*. It responds to the profound conviction of someone who feels the need to provide the Hispanic-speaking Republics an indispensable instrument of culture that would complete the work of political independence. (Grases, *La épica* 20 qtd. in Altschul, *Geographies* 138-9)[225]

In a typical *hispanista* move, Grases is attempting to write Latin American premodernity as a continuation of the Iberian Middle Ages, and to even incorporate a Castilian epic hero in the history of Spain's former colonies. He erases the local histories of Amerindians and naturalizes Spain as performing a particularly prominent role in the formation of the identity of Latin American nations and even, paradoxically, in their independence. As Altschul observes, "[e]vidently the meaning of the poem as an epic for Spanish American identity was problematic—why would Castilian-speaking Americans identify the *Poem of the Cid* as the source of a pan-Hispanic, transhistorical and transgeographic epic identity, especially after

[225] "los nuevos pueblos…habían de considerar como propia toda creación perteneciente a la lengua castellana. De ahí el valor de símbolo que tiene su trabajo sobre el poema del Cid, pues responde a la convicción profunda de quien siente la necesidad de dotar a las Repúblicas hispanohablantes del instrumento de cultura imprescindible para completar la obra de independencia política" (Grases, *La épica* 20 qtd. in Altschul, *Geographies* 138-9).

political independence?" (147). The power of the *hispanista* ideology that is evident in Grases also emerges in Latin American readings of the *Poem of the Cid* even today (Altschul, *Geographies* 146). But *hispanismo* was much more powerful and outspoken in Borges's day. It is thus understandable that, according to Borges, approaching Spain's national hero could mean standing dangerously close to an *hispanista* perspective. This is the main reason behind the derision for the poem he shows in his tale "El inmortal" ("The Immortal") (1949) and in several interviews.

A character of "The Immortal" reflects that the single reason for the "rude" *Poem of the Cid* to exist is that there has to be enough senselessness in the world so as to balance the ingenuity of a single quote by Virgil or Heraclitus (*Collected Fictions* 191).[226] The supposition that Borges shares the character's opinion is justified: his writings obsessively pay tribute to Heraclitus and Virgil, and he scorns the *Poem of the Cid* each time the opportunity presents itself. As mentioned in the Introduction, in a 1972 interview Borges characterizes the long poem as "dull and unimaginative" (Borges and Sorrentino 22). He goes on to invite his interviewer to compare it to French or Anglo-Saxon works: "Think of the heroic spirit there is in the *Chanson de Roland*, centuries earlier. Think of Anglo-Saxon epic poetry and of Scandinavian poetry. The *Cid* actually is a very slow poem, very clumsily done" (Borges and Sorrentino 22). When in another interview he is inquired about the reason for his repeated derision, Borges's sardonic answer is that the *Poem of the Cid* is a children's book: "They told me they were going to make a version of that poem for adults, but I don't know if it's true or not, no? I had the other one. Not the one for adults" (Cortínez 52).[227]

[226] "rústico" (Borges, "El Aleph" 541).

[227] Borges's commentators attribute his scorn for Spain's foundational epic to different factors. Some argue that the poem's style is to blame; it is claimed to be "terse." Lema-Hincapié insinuates that when ascribing to the *Poem of the Cid* a "rustic" quality, Borges "is surely thinking of the essentially territorial roots of the work, that is, as

Borges's wariness toward the *Poem of the Cid* can be sensed in the guarded attitude he displays toward the admiration for Spain shown in the writings of Mexican poet, novelist, and essayist Alfonso Reyes (1889-1959). In different conversations with his friend Bioy Casares spanning from the 1930s to the 1980s, Borges criticizes Reyes's deference to the Spanish intellectuals Ortega y Gasset and Menéndez Pelayo—in other words, Borges had detected Reyes's borderline *hispanismo* (Bioy Casares 419, 431). In 1968, he comments that Reyes's love of Spain had been detrimental to him (Bioy Casares 506). Not incidentally, just as Bello had drafted an edition of the *Poem of the Cid* during the nineteenth century, Reyes had done the same during the twentieth. Unlike Bello's, Reyes's edition was a modern prose version of the poem, popular enough to warrant several reprints—it was meant to be used in high schools, and it was used in many of them, in Latin America, for many years.

Reyes was an authentic polymath and medieval philology was one of his many interests. He was an ambassador to Mexico in Argentina from 1927 to 1930; it was then when he became a close friend of Borges. Before traveling to Buenos Aires, Reyes had lived in the peninsula for ten years, from 1914 until 1924. He had worked under the mentorship of famed Spanish medievalist Menéndez Pidal, specialist par excellence on the *Poem of the Cid*. When Reyes died in 1959, Borges wrote an emotional elegy entitled "In Memoriam: A.R." (1960). While the poem

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Fishburn and Hughes observe, in a style product of ["piensa muy seguramente en la raíz esencialmente territorial de la obra, esto es, como bien lo anotan Fishburn y Hughes, en un estilo surgido en"] 'a frontier society, sober and dry like its habitat, the Castilian plateau, reflected in a terse style which conveys excitement without undue recourse to poetic ornament or dramatic intensity'" (Lema-Hincapié 210). Others downplay Borges's dismissive comments about Spanish literature as a mode of provocation and as a manifestation of his ruthless irony (Cañeque y Rodríguez Monegal 361). In his 2008 article "Borges, el hispanismo y la política del idioma" ("Borges, *Hispanismo* and the Politics of Language"), Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones goes a step further when he argues that the Argentine writer is not simply calling into question the literary quality of certain Spanish works, but he is also challenging the strand of philology allied with *hispanismo* (161). Gómez López-Quiñones shows how Borges opposes the Spanish medievalist and philologist Castro and other *hispanistas* of the time. My comments in the body of the chapter provide further support to Gómez López-Quiñones's thesis about Borges's critical stance towards the elite of the *hispanista* philology of his time.

acknowledges Reyes's edition of the *Poem of the Cid*, there is a certain resistance in the recognition, as if Borges wanted to move beyond it:

> Beyond the Myo Cid with slow gait
> And that flock of folk that strive to be obscure,
> He tracked that fugitive literature
> As far as the suburbs of the city slang. (*Dreamtigers* 75)[228]

The stanza alludes to two very different types of philology: a Spanish-oriented one represented by both the *Poem of the Cid* and by Menéndez Pidal, and a more Latin American one interested in the variations of Spanish spoken in Buenos Aires—not to denounce as *hispanistas* did, but rather to explore it. In the philological world, it is Reyes's modern prose version of the epic that is better known. The stanza suggests that Borges would rather focus on Reyes's curiosity regarding the Buenos Aires's underworld idiom, or *lunfardo*—almost as if Reyes could be forgotten for his "slip" with the *Poem of the Cid* because he did show interest in a Latin American form of philology.

The second notion shared by most Spanish and *hispanista* philologists, but which Borges challenges, was that the *Poem of the Cid* was composed before the *Chanson de Roland*. The fact that Borges believes that the *Chanson de Roland* was composed before the *Poem of the Cid* is apparent in the interview quoted above, in which he posits that the French epic was composed "centuries" before the Spanish one, and also in a 1966 lecture in which a slightly less hyperbolic Borges reduces the temporal distance from plural "centuries" to "a century" (*Professor* 7).[229] Borges was thus contradicting the *Poem of the Cid*'s dating proposed by the most eminent Spanish philologist and literary scholar of the time, Reyes's mentor Menéndez Pidal. This scholar had suggested that the *Poem of the Cid* was written around 1140, implying that Spain's

[228] "Más allá del Myo Cid de paso tardo / Y de la grey que aspira a ser oscura, / Rastreaba la fugaz literatura / Hasta los arrabales del lunfardo" ("El hacedor" 207).
[229] "un siglo" (Borges, *Borges, profesor* 44).

national epic was conveniently composed before the *Roland*. This meant that it could have not possibly been inspired by a French "foreign" work as Bello had suggested a century earlier. Rather, it was a spontaneous manifestation of the Spanish peoples, uncontaminated by any imported influence. Borges does not frequently bring up the *Poem of the Cid*, but almost every time he does so, he uses the opportunity to challenge its dating, which at the time was at least partially motivated by a strident and purist form of Spanish nationalism. Borges was aware that the dating of the poem was a controversial topic and he chose to distance himself from Spanish nationalism.

In endorsing Bello's thesis about the *Poem of the Cid* being later than the *Roland*, Borges could have been implying, like Bello did before him, that the French epic inspired the *Poem of the Cid*. The delinking of the *Poem of the Cid* from a "pure" Spain "uncontaminated" by France was one of the purposes of Bello's *Cid*-French connection. According to Altschul, in Bello's case, this eroding of the poem's national character indicates that "epic nationalism, already at an early stage, provoked discomfort when approached from a Venezuelan's perspective" (162). When Borges expresses his discomfort with this epic nationalism of Spain—and also England, Scotland, and Argentina—he is participating in a tradition of Latin American philology founded by Bello and distancing himself from the epic nationalism which, during the twentieth century, is still thriving in Castro's and Menéndez Pidal's scholarship.[230]

Altschul explains that the other important function performed by Bello's connection of the Spanish and French epics was the strengthening of "Spain's essential ties to a legitimate Christian Middle Ages" (163). This is where we find the most fundamental difference between traditional Occidentalist resistances, on the one hand, and Borges's post-Occidentalism on the

[230] This nationalistic approach to the Argentine epic, in fact, still survives today in textbooks and scholarly writings. See, e.g., Corro 63-109.

other. Like Bello, Borges is aware of his nation's deep connections to Medieval Iberia. He is not at all interested, however, in continuing Bello's Occidentalist tradition, which included the writing of an exclusively "Western" Spain. In fact, Borges's derision for Spain's national epic is, in part, his reaction to the appropriation of the poem by those who, like Bello, intended to normalize an exclusively Western Spain. Because of this appropriation, the *Poem of the Cid* was incompatible with Borges's version of Medieval Iberia which, as discussed in previous chapters, does not adhere to a fundamentalist version of Catholicism.

The fact that Rodrigo Díaz had some Moorish friends did not impede the ultra-Catholic and fascist Franco regime to appropriate the song that celebrated his deeds. Because of this appropriation, despite its Arabic provenance, the name *Cid* "came to be perceived as the recognition by the vanquished Muslims of the superiority of Rodrigo Díaz" (Altschul, *Geographies* 7). The text of *Cid* is unclear as to Díaz's motives—while most of the time he seems driven by the thought of gaining wealth and restoring his political position, at other times he does claim that God guides him. Some scholars believe that the Cid was a mercenary moved by material and political motivations (Monroe, *Framing* 101). Other specialists think that the narrative does lend itself to fundamentalist readings, and that the epic grows in violence and intolerance against Islam as it progresses (Terradas 213). The hero's attitude toward Jewish characters is more than questionable. Both anti-Semites and opponents to anti-Semitism alike have interpreted it as downright anti-Semitic. Although the text is ambiguous there are reasons why the *Poem of the Cid* is an all-time favorite among those who prefer a mono-cultural and mono-religious Spanish history.

Nowadays, we will not find explicitly anti-Semitic readings of the long poem. However, during the twentieth century, the protagonist of the *Poem of the Cid* was frequently enshrined as

a representative Spaniard who, as such, had to hate Jews. In 1956, in his extremely influential volume on medieval Spain published in Buenos Aires, the Spanish medievalist Sánchez-Albornoz uses a scene from the *Poem of the Cid* to support his thesis that "Spaniards" had always hated "Jews," and that actually "Jews" were to blame for that hatred. According to him, the "Jews" brought it on themselves to be expelled by "Spaniards" by imposing extremely high interest rates on them. In this line of thinking, it is therefore only logical that all "Spaniards" hated the "Jews" (206). Sánchez-Albornoz attempts to prove his anti-Semitic hypothesis by describing the contemptuous attitude of the Cid towards Jews. In his own words:

> The usurious loans of Castilian Jews engendered the anti-Semitism of the minstrel author of the *Poem of the Cid* and of his audience of noblemen, gentlemen and farmers. The delight with which the author tells of the deception of Raquel and Vidas is evidence of the pleasure with which listeners welcomed the mockery of the Burgos's lenders by the hero archetype of their noblest ideals of life. (191-2)[231]

According to Sánchez-Albornoz, the Cid is the archetype of the noblest ideals of life and one of these ideals is anti-Semitism. Sánchez-Albornoz's reading of the *Poem of the Cid* is an attempt to support the claim that he makes repeatedly in his volume: that "a sharp opposition divides the Hebraic from the Hispanic" (164).[232] Hispanic identity, according to him, is not only non-Jewish—it is defined by this fact. Recent scholarship agrees with Sánchez-Albornoz in that the depiction of Jewish characters in the *Poem of the Cid* is not an amicable one. Unlike Sánchez-Albornoz, however, contemporary specialists do not bring up the fact to celebrate it, but rather to denounce it (see, e.g., Mirrer 179-81).

[231] "Los préstamos usurarios de los judíos castellanos engendraron el antisemitismo del juglar autor del *Cantar del Mío Cid* y de su público de infanzones, caballeros y labradores. La delectación con que cuenta el engaño de Raquel y Vidas acredita el placer con que sus oyentes acogían la burla de los usureros burgaleses por el héroe arquetipo de sus más nobles ideales de vida" (Sánchez-Albornoz 191-2).
[232] "una tajante oposición enfrenta lo hebraico y lo hispano" (Sánchez-Albornoz 164).

During the twentieth century the *Poem of the Cid* fits too well within that world of Castile that, in an interview, Borges admits to distrusting because it was rife with friars and militarism. In the interview he says: "I am from Andalusian and Portuguese stock…On the other hand, Castile, so many military types, so many friars, nothing good" (Cortínez 52). By signaling that his ancestors were of "Andalusian and Portuguese stock," Borges is implying—as he does in many other instances—that his ancestors were not the traditional "Old Christians" that Castilian friars appreciated. Likely, they were Sephardic Jews who escaped to Portugal after the 1492 expulsion. This Sephardic genealogy is also subtly evoked in "The Immortal." The narrator, the same one who derides the *Poem of the Cid*, describes someone who "within scant minutes…shifted from French to Spanish and from English to an enigmatic cross between the Spanish of Salonika and the Portuguese of Macao" (*Collected Fictions* 183).[233] The allusion is autobiographical—Borges could in fact easily shift from French to Spanish to English. The mention of the Spanish of Salonika is an evident reminder of Spain's Sephardic Jews.

Sephardic echoes are also found in the poem "El *compadre*," which Borges signed under the pseudonym "Manuel Pinedo." Pinedo is, as we saw in Chapter 1, a Sephardic last name. By choosing this particular pseudonym, Borges subtly associates the *compadrito* with Sephardic traditions, thus indicating that Judaism was not incompatible with Argentina's proposed epic hero. Borges's *compadrito* confirms that, as we explained in Chapters 1 and 2, the Spanish language he is willing to celebrate is a multi-cultural and multi-religious one, in which Islamicate and Judaic elements were not simply going to be relegated as inconsequential or pernicious. A book like the *Poem of the Cid,* which was often read with fundamentalist lenses during Borges's day, is not compatible with this kind of Spain. This view is consistent with one of the only lines

[233] "en muy pocos minutos pasó del francés al inglés y del inglés a una conjunción enigmática de español de Salónica y de portugués de Macao" (Borges, "El Aleph" 533).

dedicated to the Middle Ages in his poem "Spain." Borges's "Spain of Islam, of the Kabbalah" is far from the one of the Cid and of St. James the Moor Slayer.

Like Bello, Borges despises the style of the Spanish national epic, considers it written after the *Roland,* and feels discomfort with the idea of epic nationalism. Unlike Bello, however, Borges's rejection of the *Poem of the Cid* could also be explained as part of his consistent effort to take the focus off this particular epic poem and its readings through fundamentalist lenses. Borges's oeuvre suggests we redirect our attention somewhere else: to Averroes, to Moses of León, to writers that—although none of them perfect—are open to inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue, including Saint John of the Cross, Fray Luis de León (1527-1591), Cervantes, Asín, and Cansinos-Asséns.

The Medievalization of *Compadritos*

Instead of incorporating the *Cid* onto Argentina's premodernity, Borges looks for inspiration in Nordic medievalisms. We can see this in several of his writings, including the biography *Evaristo Carriego*, the poem "Milonga de Jacinto Chiclana" ("*Milonga* of Jacinto Chiclana") (1965), the tale "La intrusa" ("The Interloper") (1967) and a 1966 lecture on *Beowulf*.

In *Evaristo Carriego* we find that the *compadritos* share with the twelfth-century Icelandic peoples the practice of a religion of courage:

> We [Argentines]…would have had men living a very poor life, gauchos and roughnecks of the coastal regions of the Plata and the Parana rivers, creating, unknowingly, a religion, with its mythology and its martyrs, the hard and blind religion of courage, of being ready to kill and to die. That religion is as old as the world, but it would have been rediscovered, and lived in these republics, by shepherds, butchers, drovers, fugitives and ruffians. His music would be in styles, in the first milongas and tangos. I wrote that that religion is ancient, in a twelfth-century saga we read:
> "Tell me what is your faith, said the count.

I believe in my strength, Sigmund said." ("Evaristo" 168)[234]

In his volume on Borges's Nordic-inspired gravestone, Martín Hadis remarks that Borges here quotes from the Icelandic *Fœreyinga Saga* (c. 1200) (60).

The poem on Chiclana and the story "The Interloper" do not include specific citations like this one, but instead evoke medieval Northern Europe with allusions to its literature and culture. Sometimes these allusions are extremely subtle and can only be detected by a trained eye. As Hadis perceptively notes, Saxon metaphors or *kenningar* are echoed in the poem to the *compadrito* Chiclana (163-4). Here the wording "a clash of men" evokes the *kenningar gumena gemot*, encounter of men, and *mecna gemanan*, clash of men. The analogue between a viper and a knife is inspired by the numerous *kenningar* that build upon the same correspondence: *dolglinn*, viper of the battle, *sárlinn*, viper of the wounds and *linns rómu*, viper of combat.

The evocation of the medieval North in "The Interloper" is harder to miss. The action takes place at the end of the nineteenth century in a small town located in the outskirts of the city of Buenos Aires. The protagonists are two brothers who share the Danish last name Nilsen, a house, and their love for the same woman, the "interloper" Juliana. At the story's memorable ending we learn that one of the brothers murdered Juliana. The last sentence suggests that he did so in order to make amends with his brother: "Now they [the brothers] were linked by yet another bond: the woman grievously sacrificed and the obligation to forget her" (*Collected Fictions* 351).[235] That the tale is about a fraternal homosocial bond is confirmed by the epigraph:

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[234] "[Los Argentinos] [t]endríamos...a hombres de pobrísima vida, a gauchos y orilleros de las regiones ribereñas del Plata y del Paraná, creando, sin saberlo, una religión, con su mitología y sus mártires, la dura y ciega religión del coraje, de estar listo a matar y morir. Esa religión es vieja como el mundo, pero habría sido redescubierta, y vivida, en estas repúblicas, por pastores, matarifes, troperos, prófugos y rufianes. Su música estaría en los estilos, en las milongas y en los primeros tangos. He escrito que es antigua esa religión, en una saga del siglo XII se lee:
'—Dime cuál es tu fe —dijo el conde.
—Creo en mi fuerza —dijo Sigmund'" (Borges, "Evaristo" 168).

[235] "Ahora los ataba otro vínculo [a los hermanos]: la mujer tristemente sacrificada y la obligación de olvidarla" (Borges, "El informe de Brodie" 406).

"2 Reyes 1:26."[236] It is an allusion to "I am distressed for thee, my brother: very pleasant has thou been onto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women"; the Nilsen brothers' love for each other had also surpassed the love of women. This is the reason why I maintain that the relationship between the brothers was a homosocial one. In her 1985 volume on homosociality in English literature, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick provides the following definition: "'Homosocial'…describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with 'homosexual,' and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual'" (1). The limits between homosocial and homosexual are not always clear, however. The notion of homosociality has served to illuminate the nature of the relationship between male characters in a wide range of literary works including, for instance, Shakespeare's sonnets. Some Borges's commentators suggest that the Nilsen brothers were linked by a sexual bond—here I am positing that this is not necessarily the case.[237]

To those familiar with *Beowulf* and other medieval manuscripts, the Nilsens' homosocial code of honor strikes as uncannily familiar. The pervasiveness of these homosocial values in numerous medieval writings is visible in two texts which Vladimir Brljak associates with "The Interloper" in his article "Borges and the North" (2011). One of them is Cynewulf's Old English poem on the legend of St. Juliana; the other one is an eleventh-century homily, the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (*The Sermon of the Wolf to the English*) (1016). In the context of a tale of two brothers whose last name connects them to Northern Europe the name of the woman they share, Juliana, conjures up the legend of the homonymous saint, a "story of a woman who is bartered like a

[236] Thomas di Giovanni translated several of Borges's stories into English with the help of Borges himself. He reports that he decided not to translate "Reyes" because Borges thought that it was "prettier" than "Samuel" which would probably be the "correct" translation (Hurley 550).
[237] "The Interloper" has been read as expressing not only homosocial but also homosexual desire: "The woman must be 'sacrificed' to the incestuous desire of the two brothers; she is the fetishized totem that makes possible their transgression of the incest taboo" (Balderston, "The 'Fecal" 36).

thing only to end up gruesomely murdered" (Brljak 117). "The Interloper" also calls to mind a striking passage of *The Sermon of the Wolf to the English* that chastises those who "pool money together and buy a woman in common as a joint purchase, and with the one woman commit foul sin, one after another and each after the other, just like dogs who do not care about filth, and then for a price they sell out of the land into the hands of the enemy this creature of God, His own purchase that He bought so dearly" (Liuzza 199 qtd. in Brljak 117). In Borges's tale, the Nilsen brothers do exactly that: they share the unfortunate Juliana, have sex with her one after the other, sell her, and finally kill her. This murder is the only way they find to uphold the medievalist homosocial code that prohibits a woman to come between the bond of two men, and which defines her as an "interloper."

The tales' associations with the Nordic Middle Ages is further reinforced by the clarification that the Nilsen brothers are "tall, with reddish hair—the blood of Denmark or Ireland (countries whose names they probably never heard) flowed in the veins of these two criollos" (*Collected Fictions* 349).[238] It is thus not incidental that their last name is "Nilsen," a variation of the Danish surname "Nielsen." Nielsen is the second most common last name in Denmark, shared by about six percent of its population ("Nielsen"). Boreal Medieval Europe even leaves a material trace in the house, in the form of a "worn black-letter Bible," the only book in the Nilsen house (348). On its last pages someone had handwritten names and dates recording "the troubled chronicle of the Nilsens" which is "now lost" (348). In other words, the red-haired brothers' Danish ancestors, evoked thrice in the tale—the last name, the blood that flows in their veins, the Nilsen saga—could have fought with Beowulf.[239]

[238] "altos, de melena rojiza. Dinamarca o Irlanda, de las que nunca oirían hablar, andaban por la sangre de esos dos criollos" (Borges, "El informe de Brodie" 403).
[239] "una biblia de tapas negras, con carácteres góticos" (Borges and Bullrich 76).

Just as it is clear that Borges is medievalizing the Nilsens, it is also evident that he is including them in the Argentine premodern world of the *compadritos*—this world, as that of *Beowulf*, is characterized by its homosociality. Tango, as is known, was originally danced between men. The fact that the Nilsen are *compadritos* is confirmed by the fact that he includes the tale "The Interloper" in a volume dedicated exclusively to this particular figure. Appropriately titled *El Compadrito* (*The Compadrito*), it is an anthology of poems, short stories, and extracts from historical treatises about the character, music, and natural environment of *compadritos*. Immediately after the version of "The Interloper" included in this anthology, we find some typical *compadrito* verses:

> I'm from the northern neighborhood,
> I'm from Retiro,
> I never stop to look
> at who I have to fight,
> and here in the fray
> nobody was up to the dare. (Borges and Bullrich 80 trans. in *Professor* 17)[240]

This same poem is associated again with the Nordic epic hero eight years later, in a 1966 lecture dedicated to *Beowulf*. Here, Borges compares the courage and boasting of *compadritos* to that of Beowulf, and he even takes the time to recite three "poems" of these Buenos Aires' roughnecks, one of which is transcribed above (*Professor* 17).

Scholars use a variety of reasons to explain Borges's comparisons of the *compadritos* with Beowulf. Arias suggests a pedagogical purpose. To Arias, Borges was trying to bring medieval texts like *Beowulf* closer to his Argentine audience (255). Hadis instead looks for answers in Borges's family tree. The comparison between Beowulf and *compadritos*, in Hadis's view, bridges Borges's two family lineages: the Argentine-Uruguayan military one and the

[240] "Soy del barrio del Norte, / Soy del barrio del Retiro. / Yo soy aquel que no miro / Con quien tengo que pelear, / Y a quien en milonguear: / Ninguno se puso a tiro." (Borges and Bullrich 80).

English academic one (176). According to Hadis, "in the mythical realm of courage, out of time and out of space, the two lineages had finally met: it was no longer necessary to choose between the criollo weapons and the lettered legacy of his English ancestors, between a scholarly and bookish life and a life of action" (176).[241] Toswell also refers to this mythical realm of courage in order to explain the comparison between Beowulf and the *compadrito*. Toswell attributes the simile to the fact that supposedly "Borges remained deeply impressed by the notion of the hero, of the 'cult of courage,' as he put it, throughout his life" (688). This cult, according to Toswell, "lay beneath much of his work on Argentina, and it may explain, in part—perhaps a large part—his particular brand of medievalism, which focuses on individual heroes and their behavior" (688). Toswell characterizes Borges's interpretation of *Beowulf* as being deeply inflected by "the rosy glow of nineteenth century approaches to indomitable heroism, remarkable feats of courage, and Romanticized love" (3257). In Toswell's opinion, Borges's reading of *Beowulf* reveals a "child-like enthusiasm and passion which generally involves a surprisingly simplistic and literal interpretation" (532). "For Borges, the *Beowulf* is an epic poem, a statement of indomitable and unswerving heroic patience and stoicism in the face of overwhelming and unsurmountable opposition. This is a simple and charming interpretation" (532). Some of Borges's ideas about the epic genre are indeed outdated. His assumption that the *Chanson de Roland* is the standard against which the *Poem of the Cid* should be measured, and his essentialist characterization of Old English as an "iron" and "epic" language (Toswell 1405) do echo a nineteenth-century outlook. There is thus some truth in these readings, but I would like to propose an alternative interpretation.

[241] "En el ámbito mítico del coraje, fuera del tiempo y fuera del espacio, sus dos linajes se habían, finalmente, encontrado: ya no había por qué elegir entre las armas criollas y las letras heredadas de sus ancestros ingleses, entre una vida erudita y libresca y una trayectoria de acción" (Hadis 176).

The main reason for Borges's *Beowulf-compadrito* analogue regards his proposal to look for an Argentine epic hero among *compadritos*, seen in *Evaristo Carriego* and in the poem "The Tango." This proposal does imply a supposed void that only appears if we take for granted the Romantic paradigm prevalent during the nineteenth century: that respectable Western nations have a unique and distinguishable national character; that the older this national character is, the more genuine and pure, and thus, the better; that national character could be expressed in oral poetry; that such poetry could in time become a book; and that if a national culture possessed heroic and epic qualities, its national book would necessarily be an epic. However, taking into account that Borges made several ironic and even dismissive statements about the idea of national epics throughout his whole life, I do not read his proposals about the Argentine epic literally. I read them instead as displaying an ironic awareness of the futility of the need to celebrate—create—a heroic national past through an epic poem. Thus, I do not read Borges's description of Beowulf as a *compadrito* as a manifestation of the practice of the "cult of courage"—I read it instead as one of the ways in which Borges exposes that the cult of courage is, precisely, a cult, and also, that it has a history.

For starters, that someone would sit down and write a poem with the specific purpose of building a respectable heroic past takes a lot out of the Romanticism's idea of the cradle of a nation born spontaneously from the heroism of its primitive peoples. Against Romanticism's idea of an organically crafted epic poem, Borges explicitly clarifies that he is aware that his proposal of an epic tango builds an artificial ruin. In *Evaristo Carriego* he observes that when we read certain works we create our own personal "apocryphal past" to then reflect that "[p]erhaps the mission of the tango is this: to give the Argentines the certainty of having been brave, of

having already complied with the demands of courage and honor" (162).[242] Similarly, the poetic voice of "The Tango" clarifies that "[t]ango creates an unreal murky / [p]ast that somehow is true" (Borges and Bullrich 170).[243] Unlike those who ascribe to the nineteenth-century Romantic paradigm, Borges is always conscious that those stories about a heroic past are not an actual reflection of the actual past lives of the nation's primitive people, but rather an imaginary construction of such past.

Arias comments that the comparison between the *compadrito* and Beowulf that Borges makes in his lecture on *Beowulf* is "surprising" and "must have sounded quite strange in a class about Anglo-Saxon literature of the eighth century" (*Professor* 255). This surprise is the whole point. Somehow many Argentines found it natural to canonize a gaucho as their national saint and epic hero; by exposing that the same could have been done with a *compadrito*, Borges is, once more, uncovering the fact that these national epics are not organic products of the land. The comparison is surprising not only because Borges's students did not think of a *compadrito* as their epic hero but also because it would be hard to find a national saint or epic hero among *compadritos*. According to the Romantic paradigm, epic heroes are, by definition, perfect, or at the very least exemplary. Yet, Borges himself frequently depicts *compadritos*'s life as one filled with prostitution, theft, and debauchery. The tale of the Nilsens shows them falling in love with a prostitute. The poem "Los *compadritos* muertos" ("The Dead *Compadritos*") (1964) imagines their spirits revisiting Argentina after their deaths, only to return to their respective whores and knives ("El otro" 327). Needless to say, this is not the kind of figure the national elite would be eager to embrace as exemplary or worthy of the national hagiography. The gaucho Martín Fierro,

[242] "pasado apócrifo.… Tal vez la misión del tango sea esa: dar a los argentinos la certidumbre de haber sido valientes, de haber cumplido ya con las exigencias del valor y el honor" (Borges, "Evaristo" 162).
[243] "[e]l tango crea un turbio / [p]asado irreal que de algún modo es cierto" (Borges and Bullrich 170).

which they chose to canonize, was no saint, but at least he does not have a whore but a wife and children, and he is sad when he is forced to leave them behind to go to war.

The fact that Borges adopted an ironic stance in order to challenge traditional Argentine readings of their literature is not news. In this sense, my reading is in line with that of Beatriz Sarlo, a trailblazer in the study of Borges's attitude toward the literature of his country. Sarlo defines *Evaristo Carriego* as an "ironic and understated" literary manifesto about his "theory on Argentine literature" (25). Sarlo notes that "Borges never abandoned this book and over the course of three decades he continued at leisure to add supplementary pages, prefaces, quotations in English, mini-narratives, letters" (25). Borges's inclusion of Beowulf in the world of *compadritos* in this book cannot be dismissed as a simple curiosity. It is one more irony in this most ironic of manifestos—one that he would repeat in his poem "The Tango" or in his lecture on *Beowulf*.

In addition, the inclusion of Nordic medievalisms in his writings on Argentina's premodernity could be read as yet another way of countering *hispanismo*. One of the main tenets of *hispanismo* is that spatially Latin America is a satellite of Spain and that temporally Latin America begins not in the territory of the Americas but in the Iberian Peninsula and specifically in the Middle Ages. In *The Linguistic Peculiarity*, Castro repeatedly insists that the consequences of the Middle Ages were so powerful that their ripple effects continued for centuries to come, from Spain to across the Atlantic. The conquistadors, Castro asserts, were "Hispanic men" and as such, their spirit was molded during the Middle Ages (45). This medieval Hispanic spirit was so vigorous, according to Castro, that it overpowered the effects of enlightenment. Castro claims that "neither in Spain nor in the River Plate did the cultural movement of the eighteenth century do anything decisive to modify the deepest course of history, the personality of the people, which

continued to be the one which Spaniards had heroically, dramatically, created for themselves during the tenth century" (61).[244] Tenth-century Iberia is thus incorporated in the premodern history of Borges's home city of Buenos Aires. Another *hispanista* literary scholar who makes good use of Iberian medievalisms in the writing of Latin American premodernity is Grases. It is this kind of reasoning which explains his praise of Bello's studies of the *Poem of the Cid*. According to Grases, Bello's higher ambition was to

> establish a strong link with the historic civilization to which he pertained, as if he was attaching Hispano-America and its basis of culture to a broader and firmer terrain: that of the language and its esthetic creations from its own origins; as if he desired to base a future world on the most primitive linguistic monument. Such need is proclaimed in his most transcendent work, the *Grammar*…. The investigation on the *Poem of the Cid* and the problems of medieval literature serves the same objective. (*La épica* 21).[245]

As Altschul observes, "[i]n Grases's writings we find an almost raw need to securely identify the Spanish past as America's historical and spiritual heritage, to find in medieval Spain the 'deepest available roots' for the new, politically independent republics" (*Geographies* 140). This raw need also exists in Castro. Borges, instead, feels a raw need to oppose *hispanismo*, rejects the traditional Castilian Middle Ages and the *Poem of the Cid*, and prefers to see Buenos Aires's epic premodernity associated with Nordic medievalisms, with Moorish cries, with Afro-Argentines and with Amerindians—as long as they were not traditional, Castilian and *hispanista* medievalisms, they were all embraced with enthusiasm as stories that could be interwoven to shape Argentina's premodernity.

[244] "ni en España ni en el Plata, el movimiento cultural del siglo XVIII en nada decisivo modificó el curso más profundo de la historia, la manera de ser de la gente, la cual siguió siendo la que los españoles se habían creado heroicamente, dramáticamente, en el siglo X" (Castro, *La peculiaridad* 61).

[245] "establecer un fuerte enlace con la civilización histórica a que pertenecía, como si atase Hispanoamérica y sus bases de cultura sobre el terreno más amplio y más firme: el del idioma y sus creaciones estéticas desde sus mismos orígenes; como si desease asentar un mundo futuro sobre el monumento lingüístico más primitivo. Tal necesidad está proclamada en su obra más trascendente, la *Gramática*…. A ese mismo fin está sirviendo la investigación sobre el *Poema del Cid* y sobre los problemas de literatura medieval" (Grases, *La épica* 21 qtd. in Altschul, *Geographies* 140).

A Non-Exclusively European Medievalism?

We should ask ourselves the reasons why a non-European nation still uses the medieval as a reference point to construct its past. It may be that using this standard in an ironic way turns the whole concept of the Middle Ages on its head, thus exposing its constructedness, its literary quality, and its historicity. But even in approaching the topic with this irreverence, one which aspires to be decolonial, we may reinforce the premodern-modern dichotomy along with the problematic implication that anything that is premodern should, necessarily, become modern.

It is when we notice that the epitomes of modernity are nations that traditionally define themselves as either European or of European descent (white) and as naturally exercising some form of imperial power—political or economic—that we start to see how problematic this temporal-spatial taxonomy can be. In other words, the division of time into premodern and modern is not only a temporal taxonomy but also a geopolitical, spatial, and ethnic one. This notion, which to a certain extent had been sensed by Spengler, was more recently theorized through Mignolo's ideas of local history and global designs and through Johannes Fabian's notion of "denial of coevalness." Fabian's concept was originally created for the field of anthropology, but his idea has also been used to illuminate medievalisms from outside of Europe (Rabasa). According to Fabian, when an anthropologist positions himself as studying a "primitive" culture, he endorses the notion that that culture is in the past of the anthropologist's "modern" culture. Unknowingly, the anthropologist denies the coevalness of the peoples he studies, providing legitimacy to programs so that these "primitives" catch up, or to national histories that construct their "elimination" as a necessity.

However ironic and playful, when Borges compares medieval Icelandic peoples with nineteenth-century Argentine *compadritos*, he is denying the coevalness of the *compadritos*, who

would function as the Argentine "primitives." At the same time, the *compadritos* are not placed in a position of subjugation and inferiority, but instead they are proposed as heroes—epic heroes who are not necessarily of European descent. Not all of them are red-haired like the Nilsen brothers; some are of Moorish, of Amerindian, or of African descent. In a nation like Argentina that conceives itself to be of exclusively European stock, this is an impure genealogy, one which Borges was fond of evoking.

The first time that Borges raises this non-exclusively European lineage is in a 1919 poem entitled "Patriotic Music." The poem transports us from the conquest of al-Andalus in the eighth century to the one of America in the sixteenth century:

> Moorish cries
> obscurely bordering both eternities
> of the giant sky and tawny sands,
> carried with horror of heroic cutlasses
> to the limpid Andalusian meadows
> being torn apart like a bonfire by the weeds of time,
> in between the ages scurrying itself
> burning the harps in a flare of *jácaras*
> to the miracle of the epic of the Indias
> when the Castilians
> plunderers of worlds
> were stealing the land to the West.
> Disheveled by the pampas,
> Transferred from guitar to guitar,
> Weaving itself into the grief
> Of the almond-eyed Quichuan peoples
> Associating itself with the insolence of the port,
> Made once more pillory of rough lives
> And humiliation of bad women,
> Has succeeded in delving into our soul with such virtue
> That if at night a window
> Gifts the street to the walker in sonorous generosity
> He feels as if a hand had touched his heart. (Cajero Vázquez 287)[246]

[246] "Quejumbre mora / bordeando oscuramente ambas eternidades / del cielo gigantesco y de las leonadas arenas, / llevada con horror de alfanjes heroicos / a los límpidos prados andaluces / desgarrándose como una hoguera por las malezas del tiempo, / entre los siglos escurriéndose / quemando las vihuelas en llamarada de jácaras / hasta el

The blank verses interlace a succession of tunes in order to compose the patriotic music of Argentina. Moorish cries from the north of Africa and al-Andalus weave themselves into the ones of the Quichuans and then merge with the music of the suburbs of Buenos Aires, where the *compadrito* lives, and where "Borges" walks. The poem is written in the avant-garde style that Borges later despises, which explains why he eliminates it from later anthologies.

The idea of including multiple traditions in what he thought was the music of Argentina would continue to materialize in Borges's poetry. In "Patriotic Music" Borges mentions Quichuans; in his poem "The *Compadre*," written decades later, we are told that the "blood of the Native" flows in his veins (Borges and Bullrich 42).[247] In "Patriotic Music," Borges mentions "Moorish cries." Borges never claims that Moorish blood flowed in the veins of *compadritos*, but he does structure two of his poems on *compadritos* around the *ubi sunt* convention. One of these poems is "The Tango," the other one is titled "Dónde se habrán ido" ("Where Could They Have Gone") and was included in Borges's anthology of *milongas Para las seis cuerdas* (*For Six Strings*), published in 1965 (Borges, *Selected Poems* 248-51). As I noted in Chapter 2, in 1936, in his essay "The Translators of the *Thousand and One Nights*," Borges had insinuated that the *ubi sunt* convention that is a central aspect of Manrique's classic *Stanzas* may have had originated in the Arabic-speaking world. Borges even reminds us of an Andalusi famous poet who had also structured one of his poems around the convention. Those readers familiarized with the fact that this convention was shared by Arabic, Andalusi and Romance poets, can place Borges's poem within this multicultural genealogy. Thus, the idea of Andalusi and Quichuan

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milagro de la gesta de Indias / cuando los castellanos / saqueadores de mundos / iban robando tierras al albur del poniente // Desmelenada por la pampa, / trasegada de guitarra criolla en guitarra, / entreverándose con la pena / de avillanada gente quichua / descoyuntándose con la insolencia del puerto, / hecha otra vez picota de arrufianados vivires / y humilladero de mujeres malas, / ha logrado ahondar con tal virtud en nuestra alma / que si de nochecita una ventana / la regala en sonora generosidad a la calle el caminante / siente como si le palparan el corazón con la mano." (Cajero Vázquez 287).

[247] "La sangre silenciosa del indígena / Perdura en él" (Borges and Bullrich 42).

traditions being part of Argentine music is displayed in Borges's adolescent "Patriotic Music," and is also insinuated in poems Borges wrote as an adult and established poet.

In addition, the association between the *compadritos* and Afro-Argentines is raised in two of the extracts Borges includes in his anthology *The Compadritos*. In this collection, an excerpt of Lugones's *Historia de Sarmiento* (*History of Sarmiento*) (1911) informs us that the *compadre* is a "triple hybrid of gaucho, gringo, and black" (119).[248] More significantly, *The Compadrito* also includes sixteen pages from the folkloric *Cosas de negros* (literally, *Black Things*) (1926). Authored by the Uruguay-born Argentine writer Vicente Rossi (1871-1945), the book claims that the origins of the tango lie in the music of Afro-Uruguayans and Afro-Argentines. Rossi avers that "the black criollo is entitled to the rights and honors of founder" (149).[249] Along with lines like this one praising their contribution to Argentine and Uruguayan culture, we find others evincing traces of a paternalistic form of racism, such as that characterizing a supposedly typical black tango dancer as a "big boy" (144).[250] Yet, at the time of its publication in the 1920s, Rossi's book on the blacks from the River Plate region functioned as a stark reminder that Argentina's history is not exclusively white. As Robert J. Cottrol put it: "Despite the book's often paternalistic racism, it served to remind Argentine audiences of the often pronounced impact Afro-Argentines had had on the nation's culture before the twentieth century. Rossi was particularly important for reminding a then very European-oriented Argentina of the African roots of the tango" (141). By including these extracts of Lugones and Rossi in the *compadrito* anthology, Borges is clarifying that the Argentine epic hero he is proposing is not necessarily exclusively white.

[248] "hibrido triple de gaucho, de gringo, y de negro" (Borges and Bullrich 119).
[249] "Al negro criollo le corresponden los derechos y honores de fundador" (Borges and Bullrich 149).
[250] "niño grande"(Borges and Bullrich 144).

The volume by Rossi exerted a deep influence on Borges. It was Rossi who inspired Borges to identify the Caribbean music *habanera* as the "mother of the tango" in one of his early tales (*Collected Fictions* 6).[251] The story, set in the United States, is entitled "El cruel redentor Lazarus Morell" ("The Cruel Redeemer Lazarus Morell") (1935). This redentor would free slaves from the South of the United States only to cruelly sell them to someone else. In the tale, Borges mentions Rossi, who had suggested the *habanera* as the mother of the tango and who had also denounced the cruelty and hypocrisy of slavery, of the Jim Crow Laws, and of American southern states that denied peoples of African descent their Constitutional rights to vote.

Borges also uses the opportunity of a story about slavery in the United States to mention the most notorious Afro-Argentine of all times: the *Moreno*. This allusion evokes the memorable episode of the *Martín Fierro* in which Fierro, Argentina's epic hero, slays a black gaucho for no reason, simply motivated by drunkenness, caprice, and racial prejudice. The Moreno, a brother of the black gaucho, finds out, and challenges Fierro to a poetic duel. Fierro wins, but he knows that, per the gaucho codes, the brother of the gaucho he killed has the right and even the duty to seek revenge. In Argentina's epic poem, Fierro warns his sons that every deadline is eventually met and that every debt is eventually paid. Yet the debt that Fierro contracts for having slaughtered a man is never paid since after their musical duel, Fierro never meets the brother of the man he murdered so that they could have the actual duel. In one of his more celebrated stories, Borges stages the fateful meeting between murderer and revenger and, finally, Argentina's epic hero pays his debt to the brother of the man he killed.

Borges's story is fittingly titled "El fin" ("The End") (1941). In their meeting, both Fierro and the Moreno acknowledge that they do not wish to pass their gaucho values to the next

[251] "habanera, madre del tango" (Borges, "Historia universal" 295).

generation. Fierro tells the Moreno that he had told his sons not to kill other people and the Moreno approves: "good advice… That way they won't grow up to be like us" (*Collected Fictions* 169).[252] In this way, their more legendary representatives declare the moral codes embodied by the gaucho cycle obsolete. As Sarlo explains, Borges's rewriting of the *Martín Fierro* "means, allegorically, the end of Fierro as a character and as a symbol: Fierro pays his debts with his own death and, above all, Fierro is defeated by someone (a Moreno, a man of another race, considered inferior to the criollo breed) who could not defeat him in Hernández's poem" (41). Sarlo concludes that Borges "faces up to the most important text (the sacred text) and weaves his own fiction with some of the threads Hernández had left loose in his poem. Thus is the story of Martín Fierro re-enacted, and at the same time modified forever" (42). Borges not only rejects Fierro as Argentina's epic hero; he kills him.

Borges's repositioning of the character of the Moreno needs to contextualized in a nation like Argentina, that worked hard to convince itself of its exclusively-European lineage. During the nineteenth century the Argentine government had launched campaigns aimed specifically at making Argentina white by murdering Natives and by fostering immigration from Europe. During the twentieth century, the campaigns to whitify Argentina continued in the rhetorical arena. Afro-Argentines were rendered as invisible as possible. Censuses purposely overlooked them and diminished their numerical importance, either by conveniently omitting their non-whiteness or by reclassifying them as *trigueños* (olive-skinned) (Cottrol 147; Cibotti 98; Healy 114). Studies on their role in Argentine history and society were seldom, and the few that existed remained mostly undetected.

[252] "Hizo bien. Así no se parecerán a nosotros" (Borges, "Ficciones" 519).

It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that Rossi's publication of *Black Things* was received with the most absolute indifference (Cibotti 113). Borges is one of the few intellectuals who notices the volume. Not only does he write a review as soon as the book is published in 1926, but two years later he condemns the apathy with which *Black Things* was received: "I do not want to become entangled with dates or assume the role of forecaster of an indefinite future, but I am anticipating that this yet unheard of and solitary Vicente Rossi will be *discovered* someday, with disrepute for us his contemporaries and scandalous verification of our blindness" ("Vicente Rossi" 373; the Italics are in the original).[253] Borges's prediction was never fulfilled. Rossi remains mostly unknown to this day and his book did not spur any scholarly trends to highlight the contributions of Afro-descendants to the culture of Argentina. Academic interest in the topic has increased since the 1960s, but the interest was so limited that during the 2000s volumes and articles about Afro-Argentines could still be published with titles that speak to their "invisibility," "silence," or "secrecy."[254] In this context, Borges's highlighting of the African origin of tangos offers a counterpoint to the racist mandate to silence and neglect Afro-Argentines.

Borges's epic hero thus breaks with the pattern of exclusionary forms of medievalism prevalent in those nations from outside of Europe which traditionally define themselves as being of European descent. Among these nations we find not only Argentina, but also Australia and Chile, for example. At the turn of the twentieth century, in Australia, the pacifist George Arnold Wood (1865-1928) evokes medieval Franciscan notions of mercy and humanity in order to support the Boers. However, as Louise D'Arcens points out, "nowhere in his writings do we find

[253] "No quiero enredarme en las fechas ni asumir el socorrido oficio de vaticinador a plazo indeterminado, pero estoy previendo que este ahora inaudito y solitario Vicente Rossi va a ser descubierto algún día, con desprestigio para nosotros sus contemporáneos y escandalizada comprobación de nuestra ceguera" (Borges, "Vicente" 373).
[254] On Afro-Argentines see: Liboreiro; Schávelzon; Solomianski; Healy and Cottrol.

this Franciscan ethic extended to indigenous Australians, who arguably suffered greater atrocities than the Boers under British imperialism…Admirable as his defense of the Boers may be, it is difficult not to infer that he is moved to argue for their humanity because they are, after all, Europeans in origin" (80). Another intellectual from outside of Europe whose medievalism also excludes indigenous populations is Bello. When Bello evokes Germanic epic poems or Chilean Natives it is because he is trying to make Spain and Chile as Occidental, non-indigenous, and non-Muslim as possible. In the case of Spain, Bello's medievalism had to extricate Arabs; in the case of Chile, Amerindians. He "becomes convinced…that the epopee of the Middle Ages was of Germanic origin and had no connection with Muslim Spain. The *Poem of the Cid* belonged to this Germanic lineage because it had been imitated directly from the *trouveres* of northern France whose ancestry was the Germanic Frankish tribes" (Altschul, *Geographies* 187). As Altschul points out, to Bello, "[a]s long as origins were properly European—Roman, French, Germanic—there were all in principle satisfactory" (188). Just as Bello removes Muslims from Spain's epic history, he removes the native Mapuches from Chile's epic history: "Bello equated the Arabic Muslim component of Castilian medieval compositions with the native Mapuche component of the nation-state of Chile" (Altschul, *Geographies* 197). In Bello's mind, both the medieval Arabic Muslims and the nineteenth-century Mapuches were destined to disappear so that Spain and Chile respectively could become properly modern and Western. Bello's medievalism, like Wood's, reinforces a European descent.

By contrast, when Borges's medievalisms include "Moorish" peoples and also Natives and Afro-Argentines, he recognizes them as founders of the national music and culture. Yet, there are shortcomings in Borges's inclusion of non-whites in Argentina's premodernity. These limitations become visible when, in a 1966 lecture on *Beowulf*, he tells his students that "we need

to remember that the people at that time [tenth century], like the Indians in the Pampas here, wouldn't have had much historical consciousness" (*Professor* 33).[255] "Argentina," it must be remembered, had colonized the region where the Pampas used to live. The idea of the Pampas, these colonized peoples, "lacking," evoke for us other perceived "lacks"—those of the Incas, for instance, who supposedly "lacked" writing (civilization). These "lacks" are created by the archetypally imperial gaze that needs to see a void when the habits of "others"—located in the past or in other regions—do not coincide with those of imperial nations. The non-lacking nations naturalize themselves as forming part of the very center of the West, and what places them in that supposedly prestigious position is that they have writing, a proper Middle Ages, feudalism, a national epic poem, and also, what they call "consciousness" of their history—as if history were a series of facts which were "out there" in the world, and as if all they did was to uncover these facts and thus become conscious of them. Altschul cites from Stephen Bann's study entitled *Romanticism and the Rise of History* (1995) to provide an example of historical consciousness enshrined as an exceptionality of both modernity and the West. According to Bann, "consciousness of history" is a "rare and distinctive property of the Western mind" and, during Romanticism, "history became the paradigmatic form of knowledge to which all others aspired" (Bann 4-5 qtd. in Altschul, *Geographies* 32-3). "Historical consciousness is thus a measuring stick for the achievement of a highly valued modern frame of mind and a rare and exceptional characteristic of the West" (*Geographies* 33). The Natives of Argentina, according to Borges, did not possess this highly-valued frame of mind.

This is just one of the ways in which primitivizing Nordic medieval peoples and medievalizing the Pampas, as Borges does, reinforces the spaciotemporal baseline that defines

[255] "debemos pensar que la gente en aquella época [siglo diez], como los indios pampas de aquí, por ejemplo, no tendrían mucha consciencia histórica" (Borges, Arias, y Hadis 78).

modernity by contrasting it with primitivism and the Middle Ages. When he does this, Borges fails to disturb the basic periodizing assumptions at the core of the linear narrative of progress. José Rabasa recently highlighted:

> Classifying indigenous cultures, languages, and institutions as medieval is not a mere exercise in historical taxonomy but an insertion within a teleology. The epistemic violence of the comparison may be summed up as saying that, just as medieval society was bound to become modern (at different rhythms in various European locations), indigenous cultures today must give way to modernity. (29)

Another form of epistemic violence implied in this medievalist denial of coevalness is the writing of the history and identity of a nation as if those who supposedly naturally belong in the past necessarily had to be eliminated so as to build that nation's identity.

Sánchez-Albornoz thinks that Judaism was eliminated—Jews were expelled and murdered—so that the exclusively fundamentalist Catholic nation that is Spain could fully surface. Borges is superb at detecting the absurdity of this way of thinking when it comes to anti-Semitism, but when it comes to thinking about the Amerindians of Argentina, his positions are problematic. Even though he clarifies that *compadritos* could be descendants of Native Americans, he does not propose to actually invite the Natives that still lived in Argentina during his lifetime to become part of the construction of Argentine culture. Borges only acknowledges that their blood is still there, but the blood is "silent" and is not an actual living, speaking culture. When Borges medievalizes Native Argentines, he seems to imply that they belong to a historical era that had to be necessarily overcome to give way to modernity, which may legitimize writings of their disappearance as necessary.

It is not incidental that besides Native Americans, the other peoples from Argentina's premodernity to which Borges denies historical consciousness are blacks. In a *milonga* Borges publishes just one year before his 1966 lecture on *Beowulf* and the Pampas, "Milonga de los morenos" ("Song for the Blacks"), Borges observes about slaves from Argentina, that "[o]f their

land of lions / [t]hey forgot like children" ("Para las" 343).[256] The lyric might have been meant to honor those slaves who participated in Argentina's independence wars, and the song does praise their bravery. But when he denies historical consciousness to Native Americans and to blacks, and when he situates both of them in a "medieval" Argentina, Borges participates in a problematic Latin American tradition of internalization of some of the more detrimental aspects of European colonialism. This includes some traces of a paternalistic racism which, in spite the good intentions of a poem celebrating Afro-Argentines, reiterates the typical prejudice of situating peoples of African descent in the childhood and past of Argentines of European descent—not to mention the problematic assumption that they all came from a land of lions.

A Latin American Post-Occidentalist Epic

If the West were an elite club, for a long time its charter mandated the higher standing of those who had a proper national epic. The stricter versions of the charter also defined the national epic as medieval, that in practice meant that non-European nations would always be second-class members. Bello and Lugones stretch the definition of the national epic so that post-medieval poems could be included in the category and, utilizing this broadened definition, are able to find epics for Chile and Argentina respectively. By lobbying to slightly modify its charter, they are showing some resistance. However, their resistance is still an Occidentalist one because it evinces an internalization of certain Occidentalist paradigms—that attaching one's nation to Greece and Rome is desirable, for instance. Borges advances a step and exposes the porous contours of the club; they are so porous, in fact, that one might even question its very existence. It defines itself as non-Oriental, yet it strengthens its bonds to Christianity, a religion based on an Oriental book. It demands epics for each nation as if the epic genre were a superior one, but there

[256] "De su tierra de leones / Se olvidaron como niños" (Borges, "Para las" 343).

is no reason to believe in this intrinsic superiority. After all, both the *Poem of the Cid* and the *Aeneid* are epics, but the *Aeneid* is undoubtedly a finer poem.

Borges also exposes the serious flaws underlying the assumption that medieval epics are a reflection of the spirit of the peoples from each country—erudite men instead composed these epics. Highlighting this authorship is the first step Borges takes in order to efface these epics' national character. The second step consists in underscoring that their authors were not exclusively inspired by local poetry. Foreign elements are always present—the monk who composed *Beowulf* was thinking of the *Aeneid*; Macpherson, when writing his *Ossian*, decided on a psalmic rhythm; the "French" *Roland* might have inspired the *Song of the Cid*; the first gaucho poem was not composed in Argentina but in Uruguay. In challenging these assumptions about the existence of the Occident and about the national epic, Borges inscribes himself in a post-Occidentalist frame of mind. Post-Occidentalism overcomes the perverse logic of imperialism according to which nations should aspire to belong to an elite club with problematic and changing rules, even when their status would always be inferior and secondary when compared to countries such as Germany, France or Spain.

Another way in which Borges confronts Occidentalism is in his treatment of the *Poem of the Cid*. One of the Occidentalist strategies deployed by Bello in order to strengthen Latin Americans' connection to Westerners was to make Spain as Western as possible. This explains why Bello occidentalizes the *Poem of the Cid* by claiming that its author was inspired by the French and Western *Chanson de Roland* and by adamantly denying any connection with the Arab world. Bello also makes clear that he despises the style of the epic. Borges follows Bello in this disparagement of the poetic qualities of the *Poem of the Cid* and in claiming that it was composed after the *Roland*, which implies that the Spanish epopee could have been inspired by

the French one. Unlike Bello, however, Borges never shows an interest in making Spain appear more Occidental. During Borges's day, the *Poem of the Cid* was appropriated for Occidentalist, *hispanista* and anti-Semitic purposes. Borges's dismissive attitude towards Spain's epic, together with his frequent and insistent highlighting of other literary and philosophical works from medieval Iberia that emphasize Spain's multiculturalism, are all part of the same project to craft a multicultural and multireligious past for Spain. In this, Borges's attitude is also post-Occidentalist.

To a certain extent, the post-Occidentalist outlook is also present in Borges's use of medievalisms in the writing of Argentina's premodernity—yet some of these medievalisms are problematic. The Argentine author counters *hispanismo* by calling into question its strict definition of the epic genre, thereby standing on the shoulders of other Latin American scholars who had done the same before him, most notably Lugones and Bello. In this way, Borges inscribes himself in the Latin American criollo tradition of the epic genre. Borges departs from this tradition when he proposes the *compadrito* as Argentina's epic hero and when he associates him with a Boreal, not Castilian, medieval past. The comparison of Beowulf with *compadritos* exhibits a form of medievalism that simultaneously subverts and reinforces imperial discourses. Borges specifically challenges Lugones's Occidentalism and Castro's *hispanismo*. In addition, his positing that Argentina's potential epic hero could be of European, Native, or African descent counters Argentines' vision of their nation as exclusively white. Borges's assimilation of Argentina's premodernity with European medieval times is, however, still problematic since it reinforces a discourse of denial of coevalness which carries with it traces of imperial and racist thought.

A history of the varying appreciation and relevance which epic poems inspire in different parts of the world would provide us with a revealing illustration of how discussions on the ideologically charged concepts of "nationhood" and the "West" can lurk behind exchanges on topics which seem to be esoteric and completely unconnected. This chapter illuminates a minuscule portion of this history of the epic genre. Borges's principal contribution to the Latin American scholarly tradition of epics is his exposure of some of the limits of the Occidentalist tradition founded by Bello. The Argentine writer questions the assumed superiority of the epic genre and undermines the supposed need of every nation to be founded on a poem of this particular genre as ludicrous and even "damaging." Borges even challenges the very existence of the "West" when he exposes how the "Orient" was always a part of it. His proposal of a non-necessarily-white epic hero for a nation like Argentina that thinks of itself as white could have been his more valuable contribution to the history of the genre, as it would have provided an alternative to leave the colonizing bounds of Occidentalism. However, when the proposal is studied in more detail we find a "silent" native and a childish black—evidences that Borges's medievalism failed to completely emancipate itself from those Occidentalist limits.

Chapter 5: Averroes in Midcolonial Argentina

Twentieth-century scholarship on the Iberian Middle Ages commonly includes references to Latin America, and these references are frequently found in the writings of Spanish scholars. Both Américo Castro and Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, for example, explicitly acknowledge that they thought of their projects as being highly relevant for both Spain and Latin America. This region did not exist in the minds of medieval Iberians, and its placement in the studies of this era is a product of the controversial positioning of Latin America as an extension of Spain. Once independence severed the political knot tying Spain with Latin America, some scholars—*hispanistas*—insisted in emphasizing and strengthening other form of bonds that, in their minds, still linked Iberia and Latin America. The main claim of this mentality, *hispanismo*, is that a common spirit inspires every single nation whose first language is Spanish. *Hispanismo* situates Madrid, the metropole, in a privileged position to draw the contours and characteristics of the purportedly magnificent Hispanic spirit. The most visible vector uniting Spain with its former colonies is language, which thus becomes the most powerful manifestation of an assumed shared legacy and soul. Because of the centrality of language to the *hispanista* project, the Middle Ages, the era in which the common language is born, comes to the fore as a Romanticized origin myth for Spain and, more broadly, for the Hispanic spirit that supposedly continued to exist in Latin America. When *hispanistas* write about the Middle Ages, they assume that Spain is a *primus inter pares* among the nations of the Spanish-speaking world. Naturally, *anti-hispanistas* counter this ideology in their writings about the Middle Ages. This chapter will explore the multitude of ways in which Borges's approach to the Iberian Middle Ages was inextricably bound with his *anti-hispanismo*.

Studies on Borges's *anti-hispanismo* concentrate on the essays that explicitly denounce *hispanista* ideology. The piece which is most often cited is his 1941 essay "Doctor Américo Castro is Alarmed," a scathing review of Castro's philological and historical examination of the Spanish which was spoken in twentieth-century Argentina. However, Borges's attitude to the former empire of his country is not solely found in his essays. His ideas about complex topics such as authorship, literary genealogy, and influence are sometimes found in his fantasy tales. The case of "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" is paradigmatic in this sense, as it has become a classic in the study of the deconstruction of the concepts of authorship and influence. This study posits that the nuances of Borges's ideas about the relationship between Spain and its former colonies is better understood in "Averroes's Search." Although set in twelfth-century al-Andalus, the story alludes to the incipient version of Spanish that was being spoken by the masses of the streets of Iberia (*Collected Fictions* 236). The first paragraph of the tale notably mentions that "Averroes" feels "Spain." The mention of Spain and of the Spanish language in a story written in Spanish is far from incidental—an aspect of the tale that has not received the scholarly attention it deserves.

This area of study has not been explored in depth, largely because Latin American approaches to the Iberian Middle Ages themselves have been overlooked. The reasons for this are varied. In *Geographies of Philological Knowledge*, Altschul explains that this scholarly gap is in part attributable to the fact that Latin American and Peninsular studies have been at odds with each other. "The friction and distrust is especially stern due to the legacy of *hispanismo*, the colonialist tutelage that Spain continues to imagine itself having over Hispanic America, and its current economic imperialism, which has become quite noticeable after Spain's entry into the European Union." Ironically, however, this blind spot has not allowed Latin Americanists to

explore the various and multifaceted ways in which Latin American accounts of the Middle Ages are not totally in concert with traditional *hispanista* approaches and how, in other cases, they are in open opposition. Altschul's volume concentrates on a "foundational nineteenth-century figure: The Venezuelan grammarian, editor, politician, and legal scholar Andrés Bello" (5). She shows how postcolonial anxieties permeated Bello's account of medieval Iberia, and how *hispanismo* was manifest in at least some of the studies made on Bello's medievalism. This chapter brings to light one of the ways in which the conversation about *hispanismo* and medievalism continued during the twentieth century.

Hispanista Medievalism

As mentioned earlier in the dissertation, "Doctor Américo Castro is Alarmed," is Borges's biting review of one of Castro's more controversial books: *The Linguistic Peculiarity of the River Plate and its Historical Significance*. *The Linguistic Peculiarity* clearly illustrates the symbiotic relationship between *hispanismo* and medievalism. It identifies, and denounces, the particularities of the Spanish spoken in Buenos Aires. Castro unfavorably compares this variation of Spanish to the "proper" form of the language spoken in Castile. A scandalized tone condemns the abhorrent state of linguistic anarchy in which Buenos Aires's inhabitants have fallen—they had failed to adhere to Castilian norms and were overly influenced by "foreign" immigration. They addressed others in terms of *vos* instead of the appropriate Castilian *tu*. References to Spanish medieval history would not be expected in a book about the Spanish that was spoken in twentieth-century Buenos Aires, but allusions to Spain's history—at a time in which this country had not yet stumbled upon the Americas—do show up. At one point, Castro mentions the anachronistic inclusion of the famed twelfth-century Arabic-speaking scholar Averroes in the nineteenth-century novel *El moro expósito* (*The Foundling Moor*) (1834)

because its author, the Duque de Rivas (1791-1865), loved Cordoba so much that he wanted to include any figure which would help to celebrate it (44). In *The Linguistic Peculiarity*, Castro repeatedly insists that the consequences of the Middle Ages were so powerful that their effects could still be felt centuries later, in Latin America. The personality forged in Spain during the tenth century was so powerful that it was not even affected by the conquest or by enlightenment (45, 61).

This understanding of Argentina's history as a continuation of Spanish history is made even more explicit in the preface to the 1960 edition of *The Linguistic Peculiarity.* Castro acknowledges that his eagerness to understand the Hispanic spirit motivated his study of both the linguistic peculiarities of Latin America and of the history of Spain. He pinpoints the origin of his interest in what he "would later call the Hispanic spirit" in a 1923 visit to Buenos Aires (10).[257] It was the "problem of Argentina," he says, which led him to examine the, according to Castro, more radical problem of Spain's history—this, because he realized it was his duty to unveil the reality of the "history of Spain, and thus of Argentina" (13).[258] This 1923 visit proved to be a turning point in his life: it was then when he discovered that he did not feel like a foreigner in Argentina and that "the unity of the Hispanic world was real" (10-11).[259] The volume, however, is a passionate denunciation of certain supposedly deviant characteristics of the Spanish of Buenos Aires that risked threatening this essential unity of the Hispanic world—those which, no matter what he said to himself or others, did make this Spanish man feel like a foreigner in Argentina.

[257] "lo que luego llamaría yo lo hispánico" (Castro, *La peculiaridad* 10).
[258] "la realidad del pasado español, y por lo tanto del argentino" (Castro, *La peculiaridad* 13).
[259] "la unidad del mundo hispano era real" (Castro, *La peculiaridad* 11).

The same *hispanista* spirit motivates Castro's 1959 anthology of essays *Origen, ser y existir de los españoles* (*Origin, Being and Existence of Spaniards*). As one reads the book it becomes clear that the Spaniards of the title are not only those of Iberia, but also those who—according to Castro—inhabit the other side of the Atlantic. Castro assumes that Spaniards could claim as their own the Nicaraguan renowned poet Rubén Darío (1867-1916) (112), and reminds his readers that even the staunch *anti-hispanista* Argentine statesman and scholar Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888) refers to Iberian Spaniards as the "Spaniards from there," implying that "Spaniards from here" (Argentina) still existed (173).[260] It also explains why Latin America is brought up insistently throughout a volume that was dedicated to "Spaniards" and their origin in the Middle Ages. The first chapter, in fact, could be read as Castro's heart-felt eulogy to the empire that Spaniards so valiantly created, and so tragically lost. Castro equates Spain's imperial project with Rome's and celebrates the fact that the Spanish empire is still visualized in its "Hispano-American monuments" (61).[261] An unabashed triumphalist tone closes the chapter by celebrating Spaniards' grandeur. The Spanish intellectual posits that this penchange for what is grandeur "propelled" them "to the fabulous enterprise of circumventing the planet, and to even try to dominate it" (62).[262] In the concluding chapter, Castro says that Roger Bacon (c.1219-c.1292), the Magna Carta (1215), Dutch Calvinism, the English Industrial Revolution and Scottish Presbyterianism enabled North Americans. He dismisses the attempts of scholars from the United States to understand their history without studying these European pre-independence facts as a naïveté (173). Analogously, he identifies the Iberian Middle Ages as the starting point for the history of Hispano-American countries. "[M]y purpose," Castro affirms in

[260] "españoles 'de allende'" (Castro, *La peculiaridad* 173).
[261] "monumentos de Hispanoamérica" (Castro, *Origen* 61).
[262] "[l]anzaron al español a la empresa fabulosa de rodear el planeta, y hasta intentar dominarlo" (Castro, *Origen* 62).

the last sentence of his book, "was to peek back to the problem of how…the peoples of the great Spanish constellation emerged to their historical…life" (174).[263] Castro's Spanish constellation explicitly included twentieth-century Argentina, where he stayed for a year, and in which Borges grew up.

Castro was not alone in positioning the Iberian Middle Ages as the origin of both Spain and Latin America. The preface to the *Complete Works* of Bello, published in the 1980s, shows how Grases's *hispanismo* permeated his study of the Venezuelan scholar's medievalism. Echoing Castro, Grases affirms that the "European Middle Ages is the source and soul of American civilization," and that it is in this particular historical era in which one should look for the "roots" of America, which are thus "more remote" than the ones one could find in the colonial centuries (Grases, "Estudio" qtd. in Altschul, *Geographies* 136). [264] He lauds and celebrates Bello because, as demonstrated by Altschul, several of the Venezuelan's ideas "echoed Grases's own *hispanismo*" (*Geographies* 139).

It is worth mentioning, however, that Bello's scholarly work did show some resistance to certain imperialistic ideas, which are studied by Altschul as "Occidentalist resistances." This is exemplified in his famed *Grammar*, which proposed a particularly Hispano-American spelling. Borges was deeply aware of Bello's works and of the innovations he had proposed to the orthography of the Spanish language written by Hispano-Americans, and this consciousness is apparent in a note he pens as a rebel thirteen-year-old. Just like Bello teaches, the y's are replaced with i's and the g's with j's. Borges writes: "*Me estoi volviendo mui haragán i tengo un odio profundo a ese farsante de Ciserón i a las raíces cúbicas aljebraicas*" ["I am getting very

[263] "[M]i propósito…fue asomarme de nuevo al problema de cómo…surgieron a la vida histórica…los pueblos de la gran constelación hispánica" (Castro, *Origen* 174).
[264] "Edad Media Europea es fuente y alma de la civilización americana" "raíces" "más remotas" (Grases cxv qtd. in Altschul, *Geographies* 136).

lazy and I feel a deep hatred for that phony Cicero and for Algebraic cubic roots"] (qtd. in Paez). This curious text was unearthed by Borges's biographer Alejandro Vaccaro (Paez), who also found evidence of phonetic spelling in letters penned by the family matriarch and in other private papers of the Borges family during the 1910s and 1920s (Paez). From them, Vaccaro deduces that the "family had surely decided that they were going to write Spanish phonetically" (Paez).[265] It is highly unlikely that anyone would introduce these notable and specific changes in spelling without being aware of Bello's orthographical proposals. Proof that Borges associated this form of spelling with the Castilian that Bello had envisioned for Hispano-Americans can be found in his commentary on a letter penned by one of his most famous characters: the Uruguayan peasant boy Irineo Funes. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Funes is the protagonist of a tale that parodies languages of extreme particularity: "Funes, His Memory." The spelling of this man who could not forget "was the type recommended by Andrés Bello: *i* for *y*, *j* for *g*" (*Collected Fictions* 133).[266] Borges grew up in a family in which Bello's and Sarmiento's idea of a Spanish for the Americas had had a deep influence—so deep, in fact, that they had decided to adhere by those rules which, although popular in the 1910s and 1920s, never became a standard in Argentina. The seed for questioning whether Americans' Spanish was different from the Castilian one was planted early in Borges's life. Four decades after his rebellious letter, when he writes "Averroes's Search," the thorny topic still permeates his outlook.

The Context of Borges's Averroes

The opening sentences of "Averroes's Search" invite the reader to imagine the geographical and intellectual space that united al-Andalus, Egypt, Persia and Arabia in the twelfth century. We

[265] "En familia seguramente habrían decidido que iban a escribir el español según su fonética" (Vaccaro, qtd. in Paez).
[266] "la ortografía, del tipo que Andrés Bello preconizó: *i* por *y*, *j* por *g*" (Borges, "Ficciones" 487).

learn that “Averroes” is devoted to his “beloved” home city Cordoba, and that he considers it “as bright as Baghdad or Cairo” (*Collected Fictions* 235).[267] We also learn that he is writing, in Cordoba, to rebuke a philosophical treatise written in Persia. This first paragraph also clarifies that “Averroes” thought of himself as descending from the desert peoples of Arabia. Later in the story, the insertion of Averroes’s Cordoba within the vast region that was controlled by the Islamicate empire is made even clearer. The tale regards three different journeys which had connected one point of the empire to another. One of the intra-empire trips was completed by “Averroes” himself, who had journeyed to Morocco. At this point in history, Morocco was the seat of the Almohad rulers of al-Andalus. Another of the trips conjured up by the story was taken by Abd al-Rahman, who during the eighth century had traveled to al-Andalus from his hometown in Syria, and would establish the Umayyad dynasty in al-Andalus, which governed a large portion of the Iberian Peninsula for nearly three centuries. The third voyage in the tale is recounted by one of the characters, a businessman who had traveled from the far East of the empire, China, to the far West, al-Andalus. These three journeys illustrate, respectively, how intellectual, political, and business relationships created a dense network of connections within the Arabic-speaking world. The geography in which the story includes Cordoba stretched from China to al-Andalus, and included in its path Iraq, Syria, the Arab Peninsula, Egypt and Morocco.[268]

[267] “querida…no menos clara que Bagdad o que el Cairo” (Borges, “El Aleph” 582).

[268] Most specialists overlook the Andalusi setting of “Averroes’ Search.” A few scholars, including Bell-Villada and Balderston, do refer to it. Bell-Villada mantains that “[e]verything in the narrative, from the city of Córdoba to Averroës’s dictionaries, is set up before us only so that all may eventually vanish” when in the last paragraph Borges confesses that he has failed to really understand Averroes (179). According to Bell-Villada, the drastic evaporation highlights the extent of Borges’s inability to really capture “medieval Arab scholarly culture, even to the point of using cliché descriptions thereof” (179). Thus, “Averroës’s search and failure are taken by Borges as symbolizing his (Borges’s) own limitations, his ultimately failure as artist and intellect” (178). Balderston claims that “what is at stake” in the tale is the “intellectual rigor” with which Borges recreates Averroes’s “mental world” and “not the minimal references to the local color of Moslem Spain—the fountain, the harem and so forth—” (“Borges” 204).

This frame of reference of Borges's Andalusi characters was not at all unusual at the time in which the story is set. The clear sense of competition, which can be detected in "Averroes"'s situating Cordoba a la par with Baghdad and Cairo, echoes a well-documented characteristic of this Cordovan polymath and of other Andalusis like himself. Several examples of this trait are provided by the nineteenth-century French Orientalist Ernest Renan (1823-1892), who is one of Borges's avowed sources for the tale (*Collected Fictions* 241). In his famed *Averroes et l'averroïsme* (*Averroes and Averroism*) (1852) Renan recounts that in his *Republic* Plato had maintained that Greeks were the more intellectually privileged society of the time. In his commentaries Averroes points out that Andalusis should take that place (41). The sense of Cordoba's intellectual exceptionality also comes to the fore when Averroes compares Cordoba with Seville. According to him, if a sage died in Seville and his books needed to be sold, one should head to Cordoba, whose fervent intellectual life created a perfect market for books. Conversely, if a musician died in Cordoba, his instruments would find buyers in Seville. According to Averroes, Cordoba was not only intellectually superior; it could also claim the best possible climate. In his *Colliget* he maintains, contra Galeno, that the most beautiful of climates is the fifth one, which, predictably, includes his beloved Cordoba (41).

Renan also tells us a revealing anecdote about Averroes. The story is about the sage's mutable relationship with the caliph, which was then governing al-Andalus from Morocco, Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr (al-Mansur) (c. 1160-1199). This caliph first protected Averroes, then banished him, then invited him back (Monroe, "Introductory Essay" 16). Al-Mansur ruled from 1184 to 1199, and Borges's tale thrice alludes to the relationship between him and Averroes. Averroes first recalls with gratitude that al-Mansur had sent him a dictionary from Tangiers; he then discusses with other characters the ruler's incomparable virtuosity; finally, he mentions a

trip to Morocco, which housed the seat of the reigning dynasty of al-Mansur. Renan writes that Averroes composed a treatise on animals, and in his description of the giraffe, he comments that he had once seen one in the land of the "king of Berbers" (20). Averroes failed to coach the designation of the ruling caliph in the formulas and praises which were customary at the time. Unlike the dinner party of Borges's tale, in which the ruler's incomparable virtues were lauded, Averroes simply mentions him as the king of Berbers. In order to excuse himself, the Cordovan claims that he had written about the "king of the two continents," that is, of Africa and al-Andalus (21). The reason for the confusion was attributable, according to Averroes, to the fact that the two expressions are only distinguished by diacritical points. This narrative illustrates the ambivalence which characterized Andalusis' feelings towards the neighboring Moroccans, and reveals the supposed truth of an accusation which Andalusis often dispatched against Moroccans—that their knowledge of Arabic was limited at best. It also exposes doubts about Averroes's (and Andalusis') loyalty to the Almohad who—however limited his Arabic—was still ruling over al-Andalus.[269] Renan's anecdote thus illustrates how the position of the Iberian Peninsula within the Islamic empire was, and had always been, extremely complex.

The majority of the army that invaded and conquered the Peninsula during the eighth century was not composed of Arabs, but of Berbers that had been colonized by Arabic-speaking Muslims. Tariq Ibn Ziyad (whose mirror was once an "Aleph") was a Berber, not an Arab. From the very beginning, Andalusis had Berber elements in their society which they had to consider, control and absorb (Brann 122). The center of the empire was definitely located in the East, and more specifically in Baghdad, which explains why to Borges's Averroes the city epitomizes

[269] There are less Romantic accounts of this relationship between Averroes and al-Mansur. It has been argued that either the Almohads were prone to religious fanaticism, or that their allies were, and so the Almohads were forced to cater to them by punishing Averroes (see, e.g., Monroe, "Introductory Essay" 16).

brightness and splendor. However, particularly during the time of the Umayyads, Cordoba expanded and flourished to the point that it became one of the largest and most vital cities of the time, and was much more populous than any European city. Iberians had even declared Cordoba a Caliphate. The situation became more complicated when the Almoravids (1091-1146) and then the Almohads (1146-1269) ruled over the south of Iberia. In this context, the anecdote about the ambiguous way in which Averroes addressed al-Mansur reveals the mixed feelings Andalusis harbored for the Almohad rulers—the reluctance they showed when being pressed to acknowledge that they were ruling over both Africa *and* Al-Andalus.

Averroes's sense of competition with Morocco, Baghdad and Cairo was far from exceptional. Borges hints at this when one of the characters in the tale swears that "there were no roses like those which bedeck the villas of Andalusia" (237).[270] This time, it is Andalusi flora which is supposedly superior to that of the rest of the known world (237). The tale notes that this character had not even looked at the roses he was supposedly praising, revealing that he was just parroting something he was used to hearing. This character reflects both Averroes's claims to Cordoba's outstanding weather and first-class intellectual ambiance and the verses of nature poetry, a genre that was especially popular, and officially supported, in al-Andalus. Roses are by far the more popular flower in Andalusi nature poems. Averroes and the character in Borges's tale were reflecting a feeling among Andalusis that had, by that time, become a cliché. An Andalusi author cited by Conde in his *History of the Dominion of Arabs in Spain*—one of Borges's sources for medieval Iberia—finds it useful to characterize al-Andalus as "Syria in the generosity of its heaven and earth, Yemen or blissful Arabia in its temperament, India in its aromas and flowers, Hejiaz in its fruits and manufactures, Cathay or China in its beautiful and

[270] "no había rosas como las rosas que decoran los cármenes andaluces" (Borges, "El Aleph" 583).

abundant mines" and "Adana in the profits from its shores" (22).[271] To the writer, the list of analogues serves only to show that in the "the career of their excellences" no other region "could surpass al-Andalus" and that "in this competition al-Andalus tops all the regions of the East and of the West" (21).[272] The Arabist Ross Brann provides other examples of this sense of competition in his article "Andalusi 'Exceptionalism'" (2013). Brann writes that the historian Ibn Hayyan (d. 1076) and the literary cultural historian Ibn Bassan (twelfth century) "devote considerable space to praising Andalusi cultural achievement, implicitly or explicitly placing it on a la par with their Eastern rivals" (127)—just as Borges's Averroes. Brann also cites the Grenadian polymath Ibn al-Khatib (1313-1375), whose poems now decorate the walls of the Alhambra, the impressive palace that Borges visited twice. Al-Khatib effusively commends al-Andalus in these terms:

> God, may He be exalted, has endowed the country of al-Andalus with fertile lands and abundant irrigation, sweet foods and swift animals, bountiful fruits, plentiful waters, extensive dwellings, clothing of excellent quality, fine utensils; plenty of weapons, and pure air. He has endowed its people with whiteness in complexion, superior intellect, and aptitude for crafts, verve for the sciences, penetrating discernment, cultural refinement mostly lacking in other lands. (al-Maqqari 1:125-6; trans. by Brann).

Al-Khatib mentions how God endowed Andalusis with "whiteness in complexion." Borges's tale constantly brings to mind the differences and similarities between Andalusis and their Eastern rivals identified by Brann and other scholars. One of these differences is related to skin and hair tone; the narrator mentions a curious incident in which dark-haired women attacked one of the slaves of "Averroes," who was red-haired. To a reader familiar with Andalusi poetry and lore, this scene evokes the ethnic and ideological connotations which different colors of hair

[271] "es Siria en bondad de cielo y tierra, Yemen o feliz Arabia en su temperamento, India en sus aromas y flores, Hejias en sus frutos y producciones, Catay o China en sus preciosas y abundantes minas, Adena en las utilidades de sus costas" (Conde 22).
[272] "las amenidades de España no las puede igualar o espresar el mas elegante discurso, ni en la carrera de sus excelencias hay quien se le adelante, que en esta competencia aventaja a todas las regiones de Oriente y Occidente" (Conde 21).

elicit in the Arabic-speaking world of the time. Blonds and red-heads were discriminated against by part of the imperial aristocracy, as hair color was a distinguishing point between the prestigious "Arabs" and Andalusis. The prejudice against blond and red-haired people was common in the Arab world; they were "naturally, ethnic non-Arabs, and therefore outsiders" (Monroe, "Arabic Literary...(II)" 320). Some Andalusis parroted Arab prejudices. A text attributed to Aristotle which circulated in al-Andalus warned that blond hair and blue eyes were signs of shamelessness, fornication, and treachery (Monroe, "Arabic Literary...(II)" 320). This bigotry was echoed in Catalan proverbs such as "'*Amb roig de mal pèl, ni al cel*" ('With an inauspicious-haired redhead [do not go] even if it is to heaven') and '*Home roig, de la fornada de Judes*' ('A redheaded man is an associate [lit. 'from the baking'] of Judas'" (Monroe, "Arabic Literary...(II)" 320). However, some Andalusis still tried to maintain the fiction of a distinguished Arab genealogy even if their hair was not dark.

Most Andalusi aristocratic families would try to include themselves in an Arab genealogy. The Andalusi-Arabic specialist James T. Monroe writes that "these Andalusians were 'Arabs' in culture and…group solidarity, though not always in race. Although they maintained the fiction of Arab descent, in actual fact many of them had become fused with native blood through a long process of intermarriage with Andalusian women" ("Introductory Essay" 3). Some of these Andalusi women were not like the archetypical Arab beauty, but instead were of a light complexion, like the slave of "Averroes." Like Borges's Averroes, who thinks of himself as being of Arab descent, "the leaders of al-Andalus were Arabs in the measure that they thought they were, or wanted to be so. They were also Muslims, yet they considered themselves superior to the neo-Muslims of Peninsular stock" (Monroe, "Introductory Essay" 4). This is the case, for instance, with the Umayyads. They thought of themselves as belonging to the most distinguished

Arab aristocracy, even when their hair was not dark. As Ibn Hazm reports, the Andalusi Umayyad's were all blond (Monroe, "Arabic Literary...(II)" 320). "This is confirmed by the poet Ibn Zaydūn who, in his poem known as the 'Nūniyya', describes his beloved, the Umayyad princess Wallada as having blond hair: 'It is as if [God] had fashioned [her] of silver unalloyed, and had crowned [her] with a crown of gleaming native gold [hair] in uniqueness of creation and embellishment of beauty" (Monroe, "Arabic Literary...(II)" 321). Ibn Quzman also mentions the lighter complexion of Andalusis in his famous zajals. The zajal master distanced himself from "Arabs" by composing in a postclassical literary form and by consistently describing himself as being blond and blue-eyed.[273] Borges, and at least a portion of his readership, were acquainted with these famed poems and with the implications of not having dark hair in al-Andalus.

The mention of a fight between two women with different hair colors is thus one more reminder of the fact that, in some aspects, Andalusis differed from "Arabs." This difference motivates what Brann calls the trope or motif of Andalusi exceptionalism. He explains that this motif is an integral part of "Andalusi cultural and historical self-definition" and that it was a way to assert an identity different from that of the rest of the Islamicate empire (122). Although Andalusi exceptionalism was motivated by a need to distinguish itself from other regions of the empire, the reason for this sense of necessity is uncertain. As Brann points out, Andalusi exceptionalism could stem from "pride of place, provincialism, apologetic or defensive, or as authorizing a culturally powerful Andalusi identity in counterpoint to political weakness" (127). Monroe argues that in those specific cases in which neo-Muslim Andalusis who do not think of themselves of being of Arab extraction compare themselves to "Arabs," they could also be reacting to the fact that, in some instances, they "were treated as second class citizens by an Arab

[273] See: Monroe, "Arabic Literary...(II)" 230.

aristocracy entirely absorbed with its concern for tribal honor as embodied in the glorious traditions of the pagan days preserved by Arabic poetry" ("Introductory Essay" 1). In this limited sense, and "[w]ith all due reservations"—Monroe qualifies—it could be said that theirs "was a battle for civil rights in which the prize to be gained was social equality" ("Introductory Essay" 13). Spanish Arabists who write during Borges's lifetime do not discuss the specific motives for the trope in terms of Andalusi exceptionalism, but they do have specific and polemic opinions about al-Andalus' position within the Islamic empire.

Spanish-speaking Arabists of Borges's day even have a say on how Andalusis' particular colonial situation affected their poetry. A wide range of colonial and postcolonial anxieties permeates their medievalisms. They describe al-Andalus as part of an empire, and do not have any reservations about the fact that empires exist during the Middle Ages, or that such empires could be compared to the "modern" Spanish empire founded in 1492. In this very limited sense, they are in line with Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, one of the theorists who has paved the way to the study of postcolonial aspects of the Middle Ages. According to Cohen, "[j]ust as there was never a time before colony, there has never yet been a time when the colonial has been outgrown" (3). Cohen's ideas not only inspired the use of postcolonial theory to better understand the Middle Ages, but also to illuminate the significance of medievalisms from outside of Europe. Altschul finds that Cohen's notions about empires during the Middle Ages can shed light on our understanding of colonial and decolonial movements in Latin America:

> Cohen's concept, developed for the one thousand years that comprise the middle ages, proposes a sedimented movement of colonization and decolonization with no sharp beginnings or ends, no pres- and posts-. For Cohen, the postcolonial becomes "midcolonial" because communities in the past and the present are built of layers of colonial encounters and because the observation of a longer historical span shows they may be in concurrent processes of colonization and decolonization. Midcoloniality aids us in understanding that decolonization in one realm may live side by side with active colonialism in the other. In settler postcolonial studies, the idea of midcoloniality aids us

> in thinking of creoles' struggle against Spanish colonialism as happening simultaneously with and without contradicting their colonialist encroachment on Amerindians and other subordinated populations. (*Geographies* 205)

In this particular study, midcoloniality can help explain why Spanish medievalists' discussions during the twentieth century were deeply tainted with a sometimes subtle, and sometimes undisguised and unapologetic, form of *hispanismo*.

This is revealed in the preface to García Gómez's celebrated *Poems from Arab Andalusia*, an anthology that was first published in 1930. It was so popular that by 1947, when "Averroes's Search" first saw the light, it had already been reprinted three times. There was a 1940 edition, which was printed in Buenos Aires, and 1942 and 1946 versions, printed in Madrid. The 1940 Buenos Aires release of the anthology appeared under the auspices of the famed and controversial Institute of Philology. Back then, this institute unapologetically and forcefully promoted an unabashed form of *hispanismo* from Buenos Aires (Altschul, *Geographies* 37-9). One observer notes that the *Poems from Arab Andalusia* "changed the landscape of Spanish poetry" (Franzen i) and the volume inspired, among other works, Federico García Lorca (1898-1936)'s *El Divan de Tamarit* (*The Diwan of Tamarit*). Rafael Alberti (1902-1999), who was another renowned Spanish poet of García Lorca's generation, recognized the long-lasting sway that *Poems from Arab Andalusia* brought upon his contemporaries. Alberti affirms: "That book opened our eyes to all that Andalusian past, and brought it so close to us that it left me with a great preoccupation for those writers, those Andalusian writers, Arabs and Jews, born in Spain" (Alberti and Calamai qtd. in Franzen ii). Cola Franzen, who translated the poems into English, implies that an echo of the *Poems from Arab Andalusia* could be detected in Borges's "'Poema Conjetural': '*Pisan mis pies las sombras de las lanzas / que me buscan…*' ['I step on the shadow of the lances / that come in search of me…']" (Franzen iv).

In 1993, a renowned Spanish Arabist lauded the preface of the Andalusi *Poems* as

"exquisite" (Vallvé, "Homenaje" 128).[274] In this preface, García Gómez exposes al-Andalus's ambiguous situation in the Islamic empire in an equally ambiguous way. Within the circular logic that tends to characterize myths, he seems to have a hard time acknowledging that "Spain," at one point of its history, was not an empire and that, instead, certain regions of Spain were colonies of North African rulers. He begrudgingly admits that North Africans had organized an "empire" (32).[275] He stresses, however, that it was Iberia who gave poetry and civilization to the supposedly barbarous Africans. The Almoravids, he claims, invaded Spain with "veiled faces…to hide the shame of their barbarism" (36).[276] According to him, during the Almohad period Spain was forced to "feed" the African "parasites" in order to "civilize" the "desert" (41). García Gómez concludes that the poetry from the other side of the Gibraltar Strait was merely a Spanish "satellite" (60).[277] Spain's imperial and civilizing mission is thus rescued, even in the face of having been "colonized." García Gómez insists that, even if certain regions of "Spain" had once not been the center of an empire, and even if the Spanish empire had fallen to pieces, "Spaniards" had always been the imperial subjects who civilized others.

García Gómez's attitude to the either colonial or imperial position of medieval "Spain" is also revealed in his treatment of the role of Spanish and Arabic as imperial languages. This Arabic-Spanish connection, which García Gómez was not alone in making, is crucial to understand the more profound insights of Borges's tale. The Spanish-Arabic comparison incorporates García Gómez as a participant in a long-standing tradition, which exists at least since the seventeenth century when Bernardo de Alderete published the first official study of the history of the Spanish language. Alderete compared Spanish to Arabic, and argued that Spanish

[274] "exquisito" (Vallvé, "Homenaje a don Emilio García Gómez" 128).
[275] "imperio" (García Gómez, *Poemas arábigoandaluces* 32).
[276] "rostros velados…para celar el pudor de su barbarie" (García Gómez, *Poemas arábigoandaluces* 36).
[277] "satélite" (García Gómez, *Poemas arábigoandaluces* 60).

would be imposed in the Americas in the same way that Arabic was imposed in the peninsula after it was conquered.[278] García Gómez also draws an interesting parallel between Arabic as an imperial language in the peninsula and Spanish as an imperial language in the Americas when he comments on Arabic-speaking medieval Iberians borrowing images from Arabic *qasā'id*. The most typical images include the desert, camels, and camps abandoned by the loved one—precisely the sort of images that are evoked in "Averroes's Search" as having originated in the center of the empire in the East. García Gómez notes that Latin Americans borrow from Spaniards in a similar way. He wonders: "What would remain of Latin American poetry if you were to remove their loans from Peninsular Spanish?" (24).[279] García Gómez reminds us that Latin Americans "borrow" from Spaniards—just like Africans, they are at the receiving end of the equation. He does highlight "Spain"'s contributions to the culture of the Islamic world. As mentioned above, he even explicates that "Spain" had to "civilize" the Africans. He also observes that Spaniards had contributed zajals, a new genre, to the Arabic literary world (23). He fails to mention, however, that Spanish poets had borrowed heavily from Latin American poets, especially after the *modernista* movement spurred by Rubén Darío.

García Gómez conveys a powerful ideological element which Federico Corriente, a specialist in Andalusi Arabic, also detects in Spanish Arabists of the time. These prestigious medievalists include "Simonet, who tries to attribute all the achievements of al-Andalus to the 'dominated race,' Asín, who attributes Christian roots to Islamic mysticism, and Ribera and García Gómez who 'hispanize' strophic Andalusi poetry as a development of an existing native

[278] The idea of drawing parallels between the medieval Islamicate empire and the modern Spanish one continues to this day. For instance, the opening sentence of the entry for "Spain" included a recent encyclopedia of Arabic literature reads: "Much like Christopher Columbus's accounts of the marvels and riches he encountered in the New World, the early Arab accounts of the Iberian Peninsula speak of a green and fertile land and of jewels and treasures dating back to the time of Solomon" (Alvarez, "Spain" 728).

[279] "¿Qué quedaría de la poesía hispanoamericana si le quitásemos sus préstamos de la española peninsular?" (García Gómez, *Poemas arábigoandaluces* 23).

poetry that would have been perpetuated in the form (Hispanic metric) and content (differential theme)" (13-4).[280] Corriente suggests that the loss of the last Spanish colonies at the end of the nineteenth century—an event still termed by most Spaniards as "the disaster of '98"—has "some or a lot to do with" their sometimes patriotic and dogmatic account of al-Andalus. According to Corriente, when evaluating their theories about Andalusi poetry, we should not lose sight of the fact that the so-called disaster of '98 "weighs heavily on the formation of the Spanish intellectuals of the first half of the twentieth century" (14).[281] This insight also applies to Borges's tale, as this Argentine author and at least some of his readership were surely aware of the imperial implications of accounts about al-Andalus provided by the *hispanista* ideology.

The reflections of García Gómez summarized above do not serve to deepen our insights about the reasons for which Andalusis drew comparisons between themselves and other regions of the Islamicate empire, or why Averroes does the same. They could have been driven simply by pride of place or provincialism; they could have been overcompensating for their political weakness; or, in some instances, they could have been fighting for social equality (Brann 127; Monroe, "Introductory Essay" 13). What we do know is that when twentieth-century Spanish medievalists theorize about the differences and similarities between al-Andalus and the empire to which it belonged, they meditate about the differences and similarities between Latin America and Spain. When these medievalists are discussing al-Andalus's relative importance within the Arabic speaking world, they are also discussing Latin America's relative importance within the Spanish-speaking world. Consequently, for at least some portion of Borges's readership, reading

[280] "Simonet, que intenta atribuir todos los logros de Alandalús a la 'raza dominada', Asín, que atribuye raíz cristiana al misticismo islámico, y Ribera y García Gómez que 'hispanizan' la poesía estrófica andalusí como un desarrollo de una preexistente poesía autóctona que se habría perpetuado en forma (métrica hispánica) y fondo (temática diferencial)" (Corriente 13-4).

[281] "que algo o mucho tiene que ver con esto…la catástrofe del 98, que pesa como una losa sobre la formación de los intelectuales españoles de la primera mitad del xx" (Corriente 14).

a tale about al-Andalus's position in the Islamic empire would evoke Latin America's position in the Spanish one—especially when the very first paragraph of the tale is careful to set the story in "Spain."

"Averroes" mentions that things seem to be in "Spain" in a material and eternal way—these adjectives evoke an Aristotelian philosophical system, which is predictable considering that "Averroes" was, at the time, translating Aristotle. In the Averroist-Aristotelian Spanish cosmos, every single thing has a place that it must necessarily occupy, and which is perfectly adequate to the species and shape of the particular thing. Following this Aristotelian reasoning, the Argentine philosopher Silvia Magnavacca concludes that the story's observation about Spain is "metaphysical and could be extended to the rest of the universe" (200).[282] However, just as "Averroes" had very specific opinions about Baghdad and Cairo—according to him, the paramount of bright cities—Borges, like many Argentines, had very specific opinions about Spain. Instead of reading the comment in an exclusively metaphysical key, this perspective presents an ironic twist related with one of the main themes of the story: the relationship between language and empire.[283]

Borges's Averroes conceives of "Spain" as a region where things would eternally remain in their allotted place, including the Spanish language. "Averroes," however, dismisses it as a "'vulgar dialect" after he hears some Muslim children speaking in an incipient version of it (*Collected Fictions* 236).[284] In his well-ordered cosmos, Spanish definitively occupies an inferior position when compared to Arabic, a magnificent language with a centuries-old written tradition,

[282] "metafísica y se hace extensible al resto del universo" (Magnavacca 200).
[283] The implications of the story for the theory of translation and linguistics are deep and multifaceted, and have been considered by several scholars. See, e.g., Abadi, Balderston, Berg, Eco, Hulme, Sharkey, Sosa-Velasco and Sturrock. However, these studies do not address the intersection between linguistics and empire.
[284] "dialecto *grosero*" (Borges, "El Aleph" 583; the Italics are in the original).

which had extended its reach through a vast and powerful empire. “Averroes,” who thought of himself as being of Arab extraction, could be revealing a certain discrimination against those supposedly inferior and colonized neo-Muslims of non-Arab extraction.

Borges’s readership knows very well that the table would turn. The disparaged Spanish speakers would win over the Arabic-speaking ones and later expel them. They would transform the dialect that “Averroes” deems to be rude into a venerated national and imperial language. Borges’s comment is metaphysical in that it pokes fun at those who insist on nations retaining an unchanging essence. “Averroes” imagines an eternally Arabic-speaking Spain. Staunch conservatives of the twentieth century cannot conceive of a non-Spanish-speaking Spain or a Spain not eternally committed to its magnificent empire, which had strong bonds with the Catholic Church. The mere thought of Muslim children speaking in Spanish on their own soil would likely irritate them as much as it irritated Borges’s Averroes, not because Spanish is a rude dialect, but because they refuse to acknowledge the possibility of a non-Catholic and non-imperial Spanish language (not dialect).

Most importantly, the story includes several reminders that, even though Arabic is the native language of numerous Cordovans, the language is not originally from the peninsula. This is cleverly illustrated when “Averroes” consults two dictionaries. One of them is the one authored by al-Khalil Ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi (al-Farahidi) (718 CE-786 CE) during the eighth century. This is the first general Arabic dictionary; the ones that preceded it were specialized in either the Koran or in particular subjects, like plants or animals (Chejne 44). According to al-Farahidi, the ultimate Arabic standard was the one actually spoken in the Arab desert (Suleiman 13-4). The other dictionary he consulted was written by Ibn Siddha (1007-1066), an Andalusi scholar. In the most widely available translation of “Averroes’s Search” Borges’s “Abensida”

("El Aleph" 538) is translated as "ibn-Sinā" (Borges, *Collected Fictions* 236). However, the author of the *Muhkam*, a real book that Borges mentions as being authored by the blind "Avensida" is Ibn Siddha, a blind grammarian from Murcia. His twenty-eight-volume dictionary is patterned after Al-Farahidi's, and became a major source for later dictionaries (Chejne 47). The first dictionary is closer to the metropolis (Arabia, Baghdad); the second is produced in the periphery of the empire. This is far from incidental. In fact, Ibn Siddha "attributed superiority to the non-Arabs at the expense of the Arabs" (Monroe, "Introductory Essay" 11). He was a grammarian and an expert in the Arabic language, but this did not imply vowing to everything Arab. He was not rejecting Arab culture in its entirety. He was not, however, willing to accept the superiority of Arabs over non-Arabs.

At the time that "Averroes's Search" is published, the question of where dictionaries and grammars were produced bred fervent debates. According to Castro, the scandalous Argentine deviation from standard Spanish was, in part, attributable to the failure of the Castilian-based *Real Academia Española* (Royal Spanish Academy) to offer a respectable dictionary to the Hispanic world (*La peculiaridad* 11). To this, *anti-hispanistas* would answer that there is absolutely no reason why the entire Spanish-speaking world should share a single dictionary and that, even if that was the case, there is no reason why that dictionary should originate in Madrid. Castro's call to improve the dictionary of the Spanish Academy was his way to address the criticisms of the Castilian dictionary vocalized by *anti-hispanistas* like Borges. In his 1928 volume *El idioma de los argentinos* (*The Language of Argentines*) Borges describes the dictionary of the Spanish Academy as a "deliberate obituary" of words that were dead because no one used them (141).[285] He mocks the fact that the Spanish Academy introduces it as "our

[285] "espectáculo necrológico deliberado" (Borges, *El idioma* 141).

envied treasure of picturesque, fortunate and expressive voices" (141) and does not miss the opportunity to clarify that certain words carry different connotations in different parts of the Spanish-speaking world—for instance, "envied" functions as a compliment in Spain, but not in Argentina.[286] The same volume dubs Bello's *Grammar* as "highly intelligent" (Borges, *El idioma* 15).[287] With this allusion to Bello, Borges is signaling to the initial sparks of these dictionary wars, which emerged during the nineteenth century.

The first grammar written in the Americas was published by Bello in 1847. Altschul points out that on the one hand, the *Grammar* is an Occidentalist project, "one that views the new republics as cultural continuations of Spain" (*Geographies* 159). It does not stand, therefore, as "a project of emancipation" (*Geographies* 160). On the other hand, however:

> The writing of a Castilian grammar in a former colony is nevertheless also a form of criollo resistance: instead of using a metropolitan grammar, Bello wrote a separate one for the Americas; and instead of advancing a direct transplantation of metropolitan usages, he purposefully modified Castilian language to suit…his American audience…He also introduced a simplified American spelling system—associated with proposals by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento—that defied the elitist norms of the Spanish Academy…Castilian was as much the criollos' property as it was Spain's… (*Geographies* 159-60)

Not surprisingly, "Bello's work was at first ill received in Spain" as "some patriotic resentment was created by the fact that a former colonial subject purported to teach to Spain about its own national language" (*Geographies* 160). Bello's *Grammar* is a Latin American classic, well-known to Borges and many of his readers.

Those readers of "Averroes's Search" familiarized with *hispanista* medievalism can draw a parallel between Al-Farahidi's dictionary, that posits the Arabic actually spoken in the Arab dessert as the ultimate standard, and the Spanish Academy dictionary, that—at the time that

[286] "nuestro envidiado tesoro de voces pintorescas, felices y expresivas" (Borges, *El idioma* 141).
[287] "inteligentísima" (Borges, *El idioma* 15).

Borges writes—does the same with the Spanish from Castile. The dictionary of the Murcian Ibn Siddha, meanwhile, could be compared to that of the Venezuelan Bello—written in perfect Castilian by someone from an area which some thought of as the periphery of the empire's metropoli. The temptation to draw this parallel becomes even more powerful when we consider that "Averroes"'s characterizing of the incipient version of Spanish as a rude dialect is inserted precisely in the scene in which he consults the two dictionaries, and even more specifically in the lapse of time which passes between the time in which he consults each dictionary. Borges is not explicitly comparing Spanish with Arabic as Alderete and García Gómez had done. But inserting a comment about Spanish in between the mention of two Arabic dictionaries invites the reader to make this comparison, and the tale includes other subtle invitations to do the same.

The first paragraph of "Averroes's Search" reveals that Borges's Averroes "wrote with slow assurance, from right to left; the shaping of syllogisms and linking together vast paragraphs did not keep him from feeling, like a sense of wonderful well-being, the cool, deep house around him" (*Collected Fictions* 235).[288] By mentioning Arabic vast paragraphs in a vast paragraph written in Spanish Borges is inviting the reader to take into account a shared characteristic of Arabic and Castilian prose: the writing of sentences and paragraphs which are considered to be very long when compared to, for instance, English ones. As Renan reports, Averroes had even written a treatise on syllogisms. We could almost visualize "Borges" writing the vast paragraph, just like Averroes, with slow reassurance, especially when at the end of the tale the narrator "Borges" invites the reader to imagine him writing the story at a desk—in Spanish, it is assumed—thus mirroring "Averroes" writing in Arabic in the opening sentences of the tale. Not incidentally, the fact that "Spanish prose came to be characterized by very long and windy

[288] "Escribía con lenta seguridad, de derecha a izquierda; el ejercicio de formar silogismos y de eslabonar vastos párrafos no le impedía sentir, como un bienestar, la fresca y honda casa que lo rodeaba" (Borges, "El Aleph" 582).

paragraphs stocked with adjectives and subordinate clauses" has been associated with the projects of Alfonso X (Nadeau and Barlow 72). As many of Borges's readers know, these projects included the translation of a substantial body of Arabic poetry and scholarship into Castilian. "In early Castilian, sentences were short and simple, and subordinate clauses were rare. During the thirteenth century, largely as a result of Alfonso's intellectual pursuits, sentences became longer, with more conjunction, pronouns and time markers" (Nadeau and Barlow 72). The fact that long paragraphs with subordinated clauses became a staple of the Spanish language when it created its first prose works by translating from Arabic is implied, or at least hinted at, in Borges's short but revealing phrase about vast paragraphs and syllogisms.

The differences between "Imperial" and Argentine Spanish should be considered in light of a discussion, which takes up four of the six pages of the tale, and centers on the differences between "Imperial" and Andalusi Arabic. The conversation takes place at a dinner party attended by "Averroes." We mentioned a part of this conversation in the first chapter. One of the guests rants at those outdated and absurd Cordovan poets who mimic pastoral images from the desert. Celebrating a well of water made sense to the Bedouins of the desert, but becomes ridiculous when expressed by poets who live close to the Guadalquivir river. Therefore, reasons the guest, there is a need to innovate and refresh metaphors. "Averroes" counters by pointing out that he himself had been of that opinion in his youth, then argues that absolutely all poetry of any worth is encrypted in ancient Arabic poetry and in the Koran. Hence, he claims, the ambition to innovate metaphors is an unnecessary and illiterate banality. This debate reveals the metamorphosis that language and poetry suffer when they are transported to another location, particularly through colonialism.

Arabic-speaking Berbers carried to the Peninsula metaphors that were consistent with the

specific geographic context of the original Arabic-speaking colonizer. Metaphors that include palms, camels, or entail a deep appreciation for water are fitting examples, and are all alluded to in "Averroes's Search" as paradoxically foreign, yet local, to Cordovans. At least originally, they are, in a way, "imperial metaphors" crafted in the metropolis. In this context, "Averroes"'s disdain to the idea of metaphor renovation sounds pro-imperial—it seems that he is denying the "colony" the possibility to craft its own poetics. "Averroes," however, is not suggesting a simple imitation of imperial metaphors, claiming instead that metaphors are enriched in their new postcolonial environment. Daniel Balderston aptly summarizes the nuanced position of "Averroes":

> a metaphor in a classic Arabic poem (destiny seen as a blind camel) has become a mere cliché; Averroes argues to the contrary that an image penned in the Arabian desert acquires new layers of meaning centuries later in Al-Andalus: "Dos términos tenía la figura y hoy tiene cuatro" ["The figure used to have two terms; now it has four"]…The two new terms added to the figure (which initially consisted of "camel" and "destiny") are "Zuhair," the Arabic poet who composed the image, and "nuestros pesares," ["our sorrows"] the sufferings and sorrows of Zuhair's Spanish readers, so distant from the Arab desert. By the same token, Aristotle's text is enriched on being read by Averroes, and Averroes's on being read by Borges… (205)

By the same token, Borges shares with "Averroes" the sense that a certain anxiety exists in Argentina regarding the use of a language that is not originally from the Southern tip of South America, but rather from the Iberian Peninsula.

The story concludes by "Borges" mirroring "Averroes": "Averroes" is sitting at his desk, and so is "Borges." Just as "Averroes" is trying to understand Aristotle, "Borges" is trying to understand "Averroes." Just as "Averroes" concludes his translation of Aristotle with the acknowledgment that his translation reflected the vast difference between his world and that of Aristotle, "Borges" also ends his tale with the acknowledgment that a vast distance separates him from "Averroes." "Averroes"'s "failures" in translating Aristotle's *Poetics* (335 BCE) mirror "Borges"'s: "I felt that Averroes, trying to imagine what a play is without having ever suspected

what a theater is, was no more absurd than I, trying to imagine Averroës yet with no more material than a few snatches from Renan, Lane and Asín" (*Collected Fictions* 241).[289] Readers who are familiar with Borges's works can detect many other parallels between the two thinkers. Both had a change of heart regarding metaphors.

The *Anti-hispanismo* of Borges's Averroes

The differences that poetics and language suffer in different areas of an empire are key to comprehending Borges's tale and, like Averroes's, Borges's position on the topic is complex, has changed over time, and has been interpreted in different and even contradicting ways.

As with many other topics, Borges's attitude toward the Spanish language shifted with age. In his mid-twenties Borges attempts a distinctively Argentine poetics that reflects an idiosyncratic "Argentine" version of the Spanish language. This Argentine language is defined mostly by the fact that it is not Spanish, meaning that it is markedly and obviously distinct from Castilian Spanish. Young Borges consciously and somewhat melodramatically adopts an Argentine spelling, lexicon and rhythm. This stance is reflected in the three books he publishes between 1925 and 1927: *Luna de enfrente* (*Moon Across the Way*) (1925), *El tamaño de mi esperanza* (*The Extent of My Hope*) (1926), and *The Language of Argentines*.

All three volumes vindicate what Borges deems to be the regular, habitual language spoken in the River Plate. His avowed models are nineteenth-century Argentine criollo intellectuals: Sarmiento, Esteban Echeverría (1805-1851), Vicente Fidel Lopez (1785-1856), Lucio V. Mansilla (1831-1913) and Eduardo Wilde (1844-1913) ("El idioma" 21). Borges celebrates that the "tone of their writing was that of their voice; their mouth was not the

[289] "Sentí que Averroes, queriendo imaginar un teatro, no era más absurdo que yo, queriendo imaginar a Averroes, sin otro material que unos adarmes de Renan, de Lane y de Asín Palacios" (Borges, "El Aleph" 588).

contradiction of their hand" ("El idioma" 21).[290] In *The Extent of My Hope*, even the spelling of certain nouns reproduces the distinctively Buenos Aires way of pronouncing them—we read "*la verdá, la voluntá, la ciudá, la realidá, la facultá,*" with an accent added to the last "a" of each word and without the conventional final d's. Registers of phonetic spelling also appear in Borges's preface to his anthology of poems *Moon Across the Way*, where he signs "Jorje," with two j's. In adopting this particular orthography Borges is living up to his avowed intention of reproducing in writing the habitual oral language of Buenos Aires. He is thus echoing the principles that underlie the orthographic rules proposed by Bello—the same ones he had respected as a teenager. Unlike his character Irineo Funes, Borges does not strictly abide by them. However, he does replicate in writing what he perceives to be the natural pronunciation of words. In his mid-twenties even Borges's spelling reflected an urge to reproduce a language with a distinctively Argentine flavor.

Moon Across the Way, *The Extent of My Hope* and *The Language of Argentines* are epitomes of a programmatic advocacy of a home-grown form of poetics. This is exactly the sort of aesthetic so passionately censored by Castro in his famously controversial *The Linguistic Peculiarity of the River Plate*. As stated above, the Buenos Aires lexicon and tone was, according to this *hispanista*, deviant and anarchic. In *The Extent of My Hope*, Borges even commits repeatedly one of the sins that Castro is more disturbed about: he dares to address his readers with the distinctively River Plate pronoun *vos*. Rather than using the traditionally Castilian *tu*, Borges says, "*vos y él y yo, lector amigo*" ["you and he and I, my friend-reader"] (*El tamaño* 17). The purpose of this book was to "speak to the natives: to the men who experience life and death here in this land, not to those who think the sun and moon are in Europe" (*El*

[290] "tono de su escritura fue el de su voz; su boca no fue la contradicción de su mano" (Borges, "El idioma" 21).

tamaño 11 trans. by Bell-Villada 288).[291] He thus addresses them as the natives address each other, as *vos*.

Borges's attitude toward the Spanish language in this most nationalistic stage of his life is also revealed in a curious short article titled "A un meridiano encontrao en una fiambrera" ("To a Meridian Found in a Lunchbox"), which was first published in Buenos Aires in 1927. The piece is Borges's irreverent response to the typically *hispanista* positioning of Madrid as the supposed capital or "meridian" of the Spanish language. The tone is set by the first sentence: "Fuck the fraternity between the motherland and Villa Ortúzar!" (*Textos Recobrados 1919-1929* 305). The commentary closes with an equally uncouth intimation to *hispanistas*: "Hey meridian, move aside that I will spit" (305).[292] The lexicon and spelling employed is so inflected by the River Plate accent that it becomes a caricature of itself; it is permeated with localisms and with evidently Italian-inspired phrases. Borges spells *encontrao* instead of *encontrado* and attacks the Spaniards' "*parola senza criollismo*" (305). The inclusion of variations of the language in Italian is a precise stab at *hispanismo*, which was fond of censuring the influence that "foreign"—meaning non-Spanish—immigrants were having on the supposed purity of the Spanish language.

At the same time, not even at this most nationalistic phase does Borges advocate for an Argentine language of extreme particularity. Borges was encouraging the use of *vos*, but the extremely local vocabulary of "To a Meridian Found in a Lunchbox" is evidently a caricature, a way of reflecting the way *hispanistas* like Castro thought Buenos Aires's people talked, and did not reflect the way they actually spoke. Instead, Borges proposes a special kind of *criollismo*, as opposed to the traditional nationalistic *criollismo* that limits its themes to local "Argentine"

[291] "A los criollos les quiero hablar: a los hombres que en esta tierra se sienten vivir y morir, no a los que creen que el sol y la luna están en Europa" (Borges, *El tamaño* 11).
[292] "¡Minga de fratelanza entre la Javie Patria y la Villa Ortúzar!...Che meridiano, hacete a un lao que voy a escupir" (Borges, *Textos recobrados 1919-1929* 305).

topics and its language to *lunfardo* (urban local argot) or *gauchesco* (rural local argot). Nor is he interested in a language that could be inscribed in a *hispanista* project. He instead suggests a "[c]riollismo, therefore, but a criollismo which converses about the world and the self, about God and about death" (*El tamaño* 5).[293] Borges's criollos converse with the world, and not just with Spaniards and Argentines. Like "Averroes" and the Andalusi characters he talks to, they are not limiting their range of topics to local Cordoba (or Buenos Aires), and they converse about the world, the self and God.

Borges's views on the topic at this particular point of his life are elucidated further in a 1927 interview, where he echoes young "Averroes"'s supposed call for metaphor innovation. I found no evidence that the historical Averroes had a change of heart regarding metaphor renovation, at least in what Borges claims are his sources for the tale: Renan, Lane and Asín. If he did change his mind, it is safe to say that this was not a characteristic that was obviously apparent to those familiar with Averroes's biographies of the time. Borges's inclusion of this reference in the story is meant to draw one more parallel between himself and the Cordovan sage. In the interview, this young Borges, just as young "Averroes," rejects the notion of a particularly Argentine language, but then pleads to the readers of his nation:

> I believe in the Argentine language. I think that it is the duty of every writer (ours and everyone's) to approximate it. To that end, we need only to consider the Spanish language as a barely sketched and very perfectible thing. Let's all feel that urgency of innovation, let's all feel that we live in America and our adventure will be initiated. Let's say things that are not too small to fit Buenos Aires, and we will speak a new language which will be ours. ("¿Llegaremos" 3).[294]

[293] "[c]riollismo, pues, pero un criollismo que sea conversador del mundo y del yo, de Dios y de la muerte." (Borges, *El tamaño* 5).

[294] "Sin embargo, creo en el idioma argentino. Creo que es el deber de cada escritor (nuestro y de todos) el aproximarlo. Para ese fin, nos basta considerar el español como una cosa apenas bosquejada y muy perfectible. Sintamos todos esa urgencia de innovación, sintámonos vivir en América y ya estará iniciada nuestra aventura. Digamos cosas que no le queden chicas a Buenos Aires y hablaremos un idioma nuevo que será nuestro" (Borges, "¿Llegaremos" 3).

At some point during the 1930s, Borges ceases to feel this "urgency of innovation," changes his mind about the Spanish language and abandons his project of creating a particularly Argentine poetics. He realized that this needed not be a calculated project; after all, Argentine poets would necessarily reflect Argentine poetics.

An older Borges pokes fun at his iconoclastic younger self. With his distinctive humorous and self-deprecating irony Borges comments that in *The Extent of My Hope* he "tried to be as Argentine as possible" (Barnatán 206). He goes on to explain: "I got hold of Lisandro Segovia's dictionary of Argentinisms and introduced so many localisms that a lot of Argentines found it hard to understand. Given that I've since lost the dictionary, I'm not sure that I even understand it myself" (trans. in Bell-Villada 291).[295] The preface to the 1969 edition of *Moon Across the Way* echoes this same ironic stance, and also mentions the dictionaries he needed to consult to become Argentine. He recalls that when he first published the book he had imposed upon himself the superfluous obligations of being modern and Argentine. "To be modern is to be contemporary, of our own time; inevitably, we must be so" (*Selected Poems* 35).[296] Similarly, he mocks his desire to be Argentine, as if one's own nationality was something that could simply be forgotten. "Forgetful of the place of my birth, I struggled to be really Argentine. I went about the risky acquisition of one or two dictionaries of local argot, which furnished me a few words whose meaning I can hardly recall: '*madrejón*,' '*espadaña*,' '*estaca pampa*'" (*Selected Poems* 35).[297] This sixty-eight-year-old Borges is closer to Borges's older "Averroes," who thinks of the programmatic project of innovating language based on Andalusi localisms as an unnecessary

[295] "Conseguí el diccionario de argentinismos de Lisandro Segovia e introduje tantos localismos que muchos argentinos tenían dificultades para entenderlo. Dado que extravié el diccionario, no estoy seguro de entenderlo yo mismo…" (Barnatán 206).
[296] "Ser moderno es ser contemporáneo, ser actual: todos fatalmente lo somos" (Borges, "Luna de enfrente" 55).
[297] "Olvidadizo de que ya lo era, quise también ser argentino. Incurrí en la arriesgada adquisición de dos diccionarios de argentinismos, que me suministraron palabras que hoy puedo apenas descifrar: 'madrejón', 'espadaña', 'estaca pampa…'" (Borges, "Luna de enfrente" 55).

banality. This more mature "Averroes," however, also thinks of Cordoba as being "as bright as Baghdad and Cairo"—Cordoba still has as much legitimacy to define its own nuances to the language, its own poetics. It still can produce scholarship which can legitimately answer to Persian philosophers and anti-philosophers.

Similarly, Borges never became an *hispanista* who would simply mimic Spain. The essay "Doctor Américo Castro is Alarmed" was published in 1941 and harshly criticizes Castro's imperial attitude. As mentioned above, Castro posits that Spain's Castilian is the standard for grammatical and lexicographical correctness, and that Latin America should follow suit. Borges answers by sardonically mocking Castro's concerns and qualifications. Still, this forty-something Borges, unlike his twenty-something self, is writing in a neutral, not "Argentinized," lexicon and spelling. Indeed, while "Doctor Américo Castro is Alarmed" is easy for Spanish speakers to understand, and could be—and has been—translated into English, this is not the case with "To a Meridian Found in a Lunchbox," or with many of the essays found in *The Language of Argentines* and in *The Extent of My Hope*. The exceedingly local argot which permeates these texts makes them virtually impossible to translate into English without losing the local nuances and tone which are essential stylistic elements and very much a part of their "content."

The division between an Argentine and American language versus a Spanish and European one still harbors deep political and ideological connotations, and Borges's repudiation of his earlier nationalism has been interpreted by different scholars, who relate Borges's change to his changing political views, which touch upon such sensitive topics as imperialism, racism, and anti-Semitism.

Some specialists relativize Borges's early anti-colonialism. According to them, the supposed early *anti-hispanista* stance is not so strong when we consider that Borges never really

rejected the Spanish from Castile. In addition, the supposed "naturalness" of the language he reproduces in this allegedly nationalistic phase, is not at all natural; instead, it is one closely tied with a patrician elite, and excludes what is indigenous, what is popular and even what is French (see, e.g., Degiovanni and Toscano y García 16). The Cuban essayist and poet Roberto Fernández Retamar also expresses a negative opinion on Borges's views on the Spanish language. In his highly influential essay *Caliban* (1971), Fernández Retamar condemns Borges's repudiation of his earlier nationalism of *The Extent of My Hope*, and his 1951 assertion in the sense that "our tradition is Europe" (49). According to Fernández Retamar, Borges's attitude to the Spanish language reflects his pro-imperial stance. He also finds instances of this pro-imperial approach in Borges's dedication of a book to Richard Nixon (1913-1994), in his endorsement of the Bay of Pigs Invasion (1961), and in his support for the condemnation of the French leftist activist Régis Debray (53). In other words, Borges's change of position regarding the Spanish language further supports his supposedly uncritical stance towards pro-capitalist, pro-imperial and Euro-centric values.[298]

[298] Fernández Retamar is but one example of an intellectual who thinks that Borges's works reflect an unqualified pro-imperial stance. The overestimation of Borges's Anglophilia has led some critics to argue—and most of the times simply to assume—that Borges uncritically reflected British and European prejudices. Blas Matamoro and Pedro Susz Kohl, for example, claim that Borges had a clear Anglo bias and espoused British imperialism (Matamoro 237; Susz Kohl 58). This equation of Borges with everything British has a long tradition. During the 1940s Argentine intellectuals criticized Borges because, supposedly, he followed "deviant tendencies" characteristic of English literature that explained, according to them, both Borges's vaunted erudition and his fondness of fantasy literature and detective stories (Bastos 146). These specific deviant tendencies were the avowed reason why in 1942 he was not awarded a prestigious literary prize (Bastos 146). A very restrictive view of Borges's supposed literary tastes became the main argument supporting the claim that his stance was essentially imperialist. The first influential scholar to explicitly associate Borges with British imperialism was a Marxist writer called Juan José Hernández Arregui (1913-1974). Hernández Arregui was a prominent figure in Argentina's cultural and political life, and his books circulated widely from the 1950s to the 1980s. In *Imperialismo y cultura* (*Imperialism and Culture*) (1957) Hernández Arregui draws a connection between Borges's admiration for English writers and his supposed imperialists views: "All the poets that Borges admires—Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne—were national poets. One can see in them a euphoric imperialism that in the poetic order is expressed in a will to greatness" ["[t]odos los poetas que Borges admira —Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne— fueron poetas nacionales. En ellos vibra la euforia imperial que en el orden poético se expresa en una voluntad de grandeza"] (58). Later on Hernández Arregui insists: "It is not surprising that Borges's literary works coincide with the de-nationalization of the country by imperialism" ["No es extraño que la labor literaria de Borges coincidiese con la desnacionalización del país por el imperialismo"] (101). I quote Hernández Arregui because of his continued influence, which is attested by the fact that his works

Other scholars attribute Borges's change to his realization of the ills created by stringent forms of nationalism. Bell-Villada objects to Fernández Retamar taking Borges's quotations outside of their "organic, temporal context" (294). By doing this, "Fernández Retamar grants Borges neither a part in history nor a history of his own" (294). Bell-Villada observes that

> during the 1930s and 1940s, when Borges turned universalist and cosmopolitan, in all the advanced nations at the time, nationalism served as the ideology and rhetoric of the far right. The Spanish Falange, the German Nazis, the Action Française, the diverse Argentine sects, and a large proportion of U.S. advocates of "Isolationism" (as they liked calling themselves) were uniformly characterized by a provincial, strident nationalism combined with aggressive antiliberal and antileft attitudes. (294)

The context in which Borges changes his mind was 1930s and 1940s Argentina, a time when the popularity and power of right-wing sects with anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic attitudes was increasing at a rapid and alarming pace. To the perceived ills of foreignness and anti-

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continue to be cited as authoritative by critics like Susz Khol, and included in anthologies of literary scholarship about Borges, like *Antiborges* (1990). He is not just one voice; he represents an influential strain of thought that contextualizes Borges in Europe and in the English-speaking world instead of taking into account that he also wrote extensively on Argentina where, in fact, most of his stories are set. He also wrote about the literature from Spain, and even from the Aramaic-, Hebrew- and Arabic-speaking worlds. Another influential motif in the comment of his works is that Borges was apolitical. In a note published in June of 2013 in *The New Yorker* Mark O'Connell writes: "Borges's refusal to engage with politics wouldn't have been nearly so remarkable had he not lived through two World Wars and, in his own country, six coups d'états and three dictatorships." Even a superficial survey of the writings of Borges's commentators reveals that this idea of an apolitical Borges, although still popular among non-Borges' specialists, has been seriously challenged. The idea that he lived in his books and had no idea of what was going on around him—which justifies writing about him as if he lived in an apolitical fantasy world, or in Northern Europe—has been under serious attack. Borges is proposed as espousing anti-imperial views in Aizenberg, *The Aleph Weaver;* Mendieta 200 and Gómez López-Quiñones, for example. It has also been argued that Borges suggests a "complex notion of ethics based on a radical confrontation with alterity" (Jenckes 142). Several academics analyze his brief and passionate endorsement of left revolutionary causes (Rodríguez Monegal, "Borges"; Balderston, "Políticas"), his criticism of Nazism (Faberón Patriau; Aizenberg, "Borges, Guimarães"; Sierra 81), of Peronism, of populism in general (Levinson 117) and of the division between civilization and barbarism (Sarlo, *Borges, a writer*). Other scholars criticize his political views—Borges did make some controversial statements about Franco, for instance. His views on Franco are a controversial topic, with some scholars claiming that he was anti-Franco and supported the Republican cause in the Civil War, and other specialists claiming that Borges was pro-Franco. Borges initially supported a military dictatorship in Argentina, but then wrote against their war in the Malvinas (Falkland) Islands and, more critically, he attended and wrote in favor of the trials against military leaders of the dictatorship for their crimes against humanity. He criticized the democratic system, but then enthusiastically celebrated the return of democracy to Argentina at the beginning of the 1980s. He wrote extensively against anti-Semitism and Nazism. One can agree or not with his political views; one can agree with some of his political positions and disagree with others. One can legitimately adopt the position that politics are not an important aspect of his works but no one who takes the trouble to read his interviews, essays, poems and stories can seriously claim that Borges was apolitical—no matter what Borges told himself or others.

Christianity, “the nationalists counterposed their model of Hispanic traditionalism and a nostalgic, idealized vision of Catholic Spain” (Bell-Villada 292). These extreme right-wing *hispanista* groups also tended to be anti-Semitic and pro-Axis.

During this time, Gustavo Martínez Zubiria (1883-1962), who was well-known for publishing fervently anti-Semitic novels under the pseudonym Hugo Wast, had a distinguished career both in intellectual and political circles. Martínez Zubiria was elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1916 and was appointed director of the National Library in 1931. He also became a member of the cabinet first of the short-lived dictatorship of Pedro Pablo Ramirez (1884-1962), and then of the three-time President Juan Domingo Perón (1895-1974)—Borges’s nemesis. One of his first measures was to reinstall Catholic education in public schools. He was not ousted until 1944, when his links with pro-Axis espionage were exposed, and it became clear that the Allies were winning the war. But before the termination of the war, anti-Semitic attitudes within official spheres of the government were quite strong, and they made little effort to hide them. In the 1930s, a magazine like *Teutonia. Revista Ilustrada Alemana* (1933), of Nazi idology, with texts by Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) and Horst Wessel (1907-1930), could be published and find readers in Buenos Aires. The gates to Jewish immigrants were virtually closed (Elkin 229). In 1941, the ambassador to Argentina in England refused to grant visas to twenty Jewish children who had families in Argentina, telling the English politician in charge of negotiating the visas that he would only grant them if the children were sterilized (Avni 169). In 1943, legislation was passed to ban kosher meat-processing on municipal stockyards in the city of Buenos Aires (Weisbrot and Murciano 228). Jewish newspapers and other publications were shut down in the same year (Weisbrot and Murciano 228). The pretext was one intimately tied with *hispanismo*, that is, with the creation of an essentially and exclusively Castilian-speaking nation. The alleged

problem with these Jewish newspapers was that "the national censor would only read Spanish and that the Jews obdurately wrote much of their literature in Yiddish" (Weisbrot and Murciano 228). The fascists' appropriation of *hispanista* arguments was very much a part of Buenos Aires's cultural life when Castro published his book denouncing the linguistic deviances of Argentines.

It is thus not surprising that some intellectuals would denounce the imperial and pseudo-fascist ideology that inspires it. According to an article published in October of 1941 in an anti-fascist weekly, endorsing the ideas propounded by Castro's volume was the best possible service one could provide to the Spanish dictator Franco (Gabriel 9 qtd. in Degiovanni and Toscano y García 27). Borges's review of the Castro's book would appear a mere month later, in the November edition of the literary journal *Sur*—known for its pro-Allies stance. In this context, it is appropriate that the piece would open with a denunciation of both fascism and anti-Semitism. The first sentence reads: "The word *problem* may be an insidious *petition principii*. To speak of the *Jewish problem* is to postulate that the Jews are a problem; is to predict (and recommend) persecution, plunder, shooting, beheading, rape and the reading of Dr. [Alfred Ernst] Rosemberg [(1893-1946)]'s prose" (*Other Inquisitions* 26).[299] Borges knew perfectly well that Argentine anti-Semites and *hispanistas* would be delighted with Castro's book, which staunchly denounced the supposedly deleterious effects of foreign, meaning non-Spanish, immigration. He knew that the notions it promoted could very well serve the anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic spirit that was already dangerously close to spheres of power. This is the context in which we should inscribe Borges's repudiation of his early fervent nationalistic approach to language. And because this

[299] "La palabra problema puede ser una insidiosa petición de principio. Hablar del 'problema judío' es postular que los judíos son un problema; es vaticinar (y recomendar) las persecuciones, la expoliación, los balazos, el degüello, el estupro y la lectura de la prosa del doctor [Alfred Ernst] Rosenberg [(1893-1946)]" ("Otras inquisiciones" 31).

change is also alluded to in “Averroes’s Search,” this is the context in which Borges’s Averroes’s change of heart regarding metaphors should also be included. What better way to counter the most intolerant version of *hispanista* ideology than by reminding his readers that “Spain” was not always Catholic, and that the incipient version of Spanish was in fact spoken by Muslim children?

In Borges’s day, *hispanista* attitudes frequently permeated writings on medieval Iberia. Therefore, at the time, it made sense to incorporate counter arguments to *hispanista* attitudes in a story set in al-Andalus. Borges and the Averroes that he crafts both changed their minds regarding the attitude that former colonies should harbor towards the language which once belonged exclusively to the center of the empire. They are both, in a way, “writing back” to the self-proclaimed epicenter of culture and politics: “Averroes” is writing about an Eastern author, Borges about a “Spanish” one. Averroes has Arabic ancestors; Borges has Spanish grandparents too. Yet, neither is “Averroes” from the desert nor is “Borges” from Spain. And neither of them is willing to passively adopt the language or philosophy dictated from the empire’s metropoli—which does not mean rejecting all its tradition in its entirety. The tradition that Borges is willing to embrace is one in which it is accepted that, just as Latin, Arabic and Hebrew were also part of the history of his polychromatic Spanish language.

In Closing: A Map of Maps

In 711 CE a Berber-Arab army crossed the strait that connects Africa with Europe. The army did not find considerable resistance and conquered the region we now know as Andalusia. A millennium went by, and then two centuries, and then a storyteller from a faraway land wrote a short account of the conquest. He titled it "The Chamber of Statues" and presented it as a translation of an Arabic tale. This tale, he tells us, was included in an anthology of Arabic stories collected at the end of the eighteenth century, that is, ten centuries after the 711 CE invasion. The stories told in this anthology, called the *Thousand and One Nights*, were of critical importance to this writer from this faraway land. Far from hiding this fact, this writer obsessively reminded his readers of how vital the tales of the *Nights* were to his development as a writer, and he even tried to convince them that the stories they tell were also of capital importance to them, his readers, in ways that neither him nor his readers could fully understand. This dissertation examined some of the ways—not all of the ways—in which the encounter between the Arabic and Romance worlds, symbolized by the 711 CE conquest and by the stories included in the *Nights*, marked and shaped this fascinating Latin American writer, Borges.

Borges included "The Chamber of Statues" in an odd and short collection of narratives to which he gave the unceremonious title "Etcetera." We analyzed this story in Chapter 1; in Chapter 2 we examined another story also included in "Etcetera," "The Wizard that Was Made to Wait." This tale, set in Toledo, is a rewriting of one of stories told in *Count Lucanor*. We posited that by including this well-known yarn in "Etcetera," a cluster that contains three tales of the *Nights*, Borges illustrates how a classic Castilian story could be seamlessly added to the *Thousand and One Nights*. In Chapter 3 we examined some of Borges's philological tales, including "The Aleph" and "The Zahir." We concluded that the stories they tell are part of a

palimpsest: they are covering—albeit only partially—Dante's *Commedia* and the Romance tradition of courtly love, which in turn was a textual layer written over the meditations of Andalusi Sufi mystics and other Arabic-speaking poets and scholars. In this Dantean-Andalusi palimpsest we can also see the story of the *Nights* reshaped by Borges in "The Chamber of Statues," because the Aleph was once a mirror that the Berber-Arab invaders found in the land that they called al-Andalus. In Chapter 3 we also expounded on how Borges insinuates that we could use the image of a palimpsest as a narrative technique to illustrate influence, and we utilized this technique to discuss the circulation of tales of the *Nights* to regions spanning from the Mediterranean to Chaucer's England.

This conclusion returns to "The Aleph" and "The Zahir" and to the cluster of narratives Borges grouped under the title "Etcetera." Rather than concentrating on their philological implications, the following pages describe how they invite readers to suspend their traditional Western or far-Western (Latin American) geographical and geopolitical certitudes, and discuss how they shift our focus from the European mass to the Mediterranean, and then from the Mediterranean to Latin America.

"The Aleph" and "The Zahir" share remarkable coincidences with the tales of "Etcetera." For instance, two of the "Etcetera" narratives, "A Double for Muhammad" and "The Mirror of Ink," draw lively images of a paradise reminiscent of the medieval Islamic one described by Asín that, as we saw in the third chapter, is also suggested in both "The Aleph" and "The Zahir." "A Double for Muhammad" explains that since for Muslims the idea of Muhammad is consubstantial with religion, in the spiritual world of the afterlife, "some Muhammad or other is placed in their view" (62).[300] In "The Mirror of Ink," a wizard enables a Sudanese tyrant to have

[300] "siempre los presida un espíritu que hace el papel de Mahoma" (Borges, "El Aleph" 345).

visions. Among many other things, he sees "the angels of silver whose nutriment is our praise and justification of the Lord" (61).[301] To those familiar with Muslim eschatology, this passage evokes the angels of the Islamic paradise. Allah's most important angel, Asín reports, has a silver neck and a tale of pearls (*Escatología* 366).[302] Colorful pictures of the afterlife are also drawn in "A Theologian in Death." A theologian dies and, in his afterlife, he is initially placed in a house similar to the one in which he was used to living. At the beginning, the house is nicely decorated and has a flowery wallpaper. The diseased academic spends his hours meditating on the virtue of faith, but dismisses charity as unimportant and inconsequential. Angels are sent to convince him on the importance of charity but they fail to sway the scholar, who is consequently punished: everything around him becomes blurry and dim and he is sent to a hell of sandy dunes. When the tale is read along the other pieces of "Etcetera," the angels and the flowery wallpaper evoke the silver angels and the lush and florid gardens of the Islamic paradise. In the context of this Arabic-themed cluster, the hell of dunes brings to mind the Arabian desert and its contrast with the flowers of the wallpaper represents a subtle evocation of a trope that shows up frequently in nature poetry, the Arabic genre examined in Chapter 1—especially when fig trees also show up in the Andalusia of "The Chamber of Statues" and in the Cairo city of "The Story of the Two Dreamers." Fountains, rivers, and the dangerous desert also make appearances.[303]

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[301] "los ángeles de plata cuyo alimento es el elogio y la justificación del Señor" (Borges, "Historia universal" 343). For a post-structural reading of "The Mirror of Ink" see Kadir. For an intertextual analysis of "The Mirror of Ink" see Ling.

[302] According to Asín, Muhammad "sees the Throne of God, made of white pearls, with seventy thousand angles full of angels. Under the throne, a huge angel in the shape of rooster with green hyacinth eyes, a silver neck and a tail edged with pearls and hyacinths" ["ve el Trono de Dios, hecho de perlas blancas, con setenta mil ángulos llenos de ángeles. Debajo del trono, un ángel enorme, en figura de gallo, con ojos de jacinto verde, cuello de plata y cola orlada de perlas y jacintos"] (366). The jeweled angel is just one example of how the Muslim paradise Asín describes is overflowing with luxury, pearls and precious stones. The steps leading to paradise are made of gold, silver and emerald (56). In paradise one can find a stunning gold and silver mansion which is as big as a city (11).

[303] Borges misattributes "A Theologian in Death" to Swedenborg's *Arcana Cœlestia* (*Heavenly Mysteries*). This is an actual volume by Swedenborg but, as di Giovanni observes, the actual source is another volume by Swedenborg, his *Vera Christiana Religio* (*True Christian Religion*) (244). According to di Giovanni the dissimulation is meant "to lay a false track, not to mention the irresistibleness of a title like *Arcana Cœlestia*" (244).

Although “The Aleph” and “The Zahir” share images with all the tales of “Etcetera,” “The Mirror of Ink” bears the strongest similarities. This tale, like “The Aleph” and “The Zahir,” centers on a magical object that is showcased in the title of the story. The three objects are of Muslim provenance: the “real” Aleph is in a mosque, “[b]elief in the Zahir is of Islamic ancestry” and the Mirror of Ink is produced by a Muslim magician (*Collected Fictions* 60, 246, 285).[304] The three stories evoke motifs and images that situate them in locations that are, or once were, part of a distinctively Islamicate world. “The Mirror of Ink” is set in Sudan and, as we have seen, even the names of the Aleph and the Zahir place them within mystical traditions that had some of their maximum representatives in al-Andalus—the Kabbalah and Sufism, respectively.

The images that the Mirror of Ink and the Aleph show are strikingly similar. “The Mirror of Ink” is told by the necromancer who has the ability to generate magic mirrors of ink. He creates one of the mirrors in the hand of his arch-nemesis: a despot and the murderer of his brother. The tyrant asks to see a beautiful horse, then a group of horses. And then he sees “all that dead men have seen and all that living men see,” including, the magician tells us, vast seas, gorgeous women, the mysterious center of a pyramid and a large city—all elements that “Borges” is able to visualize in the Aleph in a basement in Buenos Aires. Burton knew of both magical contraptions: “The Mirror of Ink” is presented as the translation of a story that Burton heard from the wizard himself; “The Aleph” tells us of a mysterious Burton manuscript which discusses several configurations of the Aleph.

The most striking resemblance between the Mirror of Ink, the Aleph and the Zahir is the fact that the three objects enable visions that are evidently limited. The magician tells us that

[304] “la creencia en el Zahir es islámica” (Borges, “El Aleph” 593). For an analysis that is based on the assumption that Islam is present in “The Mirror of Ink” but absent in “The Aleph” see Almond 440.

Mirror of Ink showed "the cities, climes and kingdoms into which the world is divided" (61)—a world map.[305] The tyrant had asked to see "the city" that is called Europe.[306] The wizard reveals that the tyrant and him see "the grandest of its streets" with a "rushing flood of men, all dressed in black and many wearing spectacles"—even after "seeing" the "kingdoms into which the world is divided" and "Europe," the wizard-narrator still thinks of it as a city.[307] Even when magic gifted the wizard the possibility of seeing the whole world, the way in which he sees, distributes and divides space is still determined by his subject position as a Sudanese man.

Due to the powers of another magical contraption, an Aleph from Buenos Aires, the fatuous Carlos Argentino Daneri, just like the Muslim necromancer, also has visions. He reproduces them in a poem that he ambitiously titles "The Earth" (276).[308] He had set himself to "versify the entire planet," that is, another world map; this time a poetic one (277).[309] "By 1941," he had already poetized about, among other things, "several hectares of the state of Queensland, more than a kilometer of the course of Ob, a gasworks north of Veracruz" and "the leading commercial establishments in the parish of Concepcion" (277).[310] This is Borges's irony at its best. Far from reflecting the whole planet, "The Earth" only reveals Daneri's pretentious way of describing utterly uninteresting things, including the "commercial establishments in the parish of Concepcion," a gas station and the skeleton of a sheep.

The Zahir also creates a failed world map. Throughout history, the Zahir had acquired many shapes: during the twentieth century it was a coin in Buenos Aires, but in the past it had

[305] "las ciudades, climas y reinos en que se divide la Tierra" (Borges, "Historia universal" 343).
[306] "la ciudad" (Borges, "Historia universal" 344).
[307] "la principal de sus calles…caudaloso río de hombres, todos ataviados de negro y muchos con anteojos" (Borges, "Historia universal" 344).
[308] "La Tierra" (Borges, "El Aleph" 619).
[309] "versificar toda la redondez del planeta" (Borges, "El Aleph" 620).
[310] "en 1941…hectáreas del estado de Queensland, más de un kilómetro del curso del Ob, un gasómetro al norte de Veracruz, las principales casas de comercio de la parroquia de la Concepción" (Borges, "El Aleph" 620).

been, among other things, an astrolabe and a tiger. When the Zahir was a tiger, a man who was under its spell set out to draw a map of the world, but all he could draw was a tiger, composed of tigers and crisscrossed with tigers. This nightmarish tiger-map, like those seen by Daneri and the wizard, aspire to be all-encompassing. As in *Hamlet* (1602)'s renowned quote, all three characters count themselves as kings of infinite space, but are actually bound in their own nutshell.[311] Their failure shows both that the vision is impossible to convey in words (a convention in mystical visions that also shows up in all three tales, and, most importantly, that this vision is probably impossible—thus implying that the world may not be knowable.

Borges often ridicules our tendency to think that the world is knowable. In his volume *In Defense of Religious Moderation* (2011) William Egginton illuminates this aspect of Borges's stories by showing how they reveal the inadequacies of what Egginton calls the "code of codes" or "code motif." One of these tales is "La biblioteca de Babel" ("The Library of Babel") (1941), which imagines how the world would look if it were a gigantic library. Egginton writes that "[b]y a seemingly flawless deduction, the library's scholars theorize the existence of a book of books, a book that contains the perfect explanation of the otherwise unorganized and overwhelming morass of information" (21). The attitude of these librarians reminds us of that of the Sudanese necromancer, of the haughty Argentine poet and of the tiger-obsessed cartographer—they all act based upon the reassuring certainty that they live in a world knowable-as-it-really-is and that if they had the ability to see it all—to look into a book of books, an Aleph or a Mirror of Ink—they could map it. They assume the existence of a book of books, a code of codes, a map of maps, that will help them make sense of the wide array of images they

[311] It is no coincidence that *Hamlet*'s line heads the tale of the Aleph as its epigraph.

see or, in Foucault's terms, to "tame the wild profusion of existing things." Egginton expounds on the risks of the tendency to think we have found a "code of codes," a comprehensive guide to decodify, classify and understand the things and events which are supposedly "out there" in the world—or that we would be able to see in the Aleph—and that supposedly we will be able to neatly classify, know and understand. This belief, Egginton shows, underlies fundamentalism in general and religious fundamentalism in particular.

A picture-perfect example of a parody of the belief in a knowable-world is succinctly presented in the form of a map that replicates, point by point, every single detail of the earth.[312] Not incidentally, this map imagined by Borges is imperial and, not incidentally, it was produced by the Spanish empire. A sketch of the imperial map appears in the version of "Etcetera" that was included in the 1954 edition of *A Universal History of Infamy*. The map is described in a short extract that is ironically titled "On the Rigors of Science" of the apocryphal and also ironically titled *Travels of Prudent Men. Travels of Prudent Men* was supposedly authored by "Suárez Miranda" and was first published in Lleida, Spain, in 1658.

[312] "On the Rigors of Science" is one of Borges's more cited stories. Mignolo, for example, alludes to "On the Rigors of Science" in a 2008 article. Mignolo characterizes an intellectual named Carlos Prieto as a Marxist "missionary" of the twenty-first century, and compares him with the cartographers of Borges's tale: "I commented that his position reminded me of Jorge Luis Borges's map, a map which was confused with the territory. With this, I referred metaphorically to the fact that the position of Carlos responded to the belief of objectivity without parentheses, while my position was based on a sense of objectivity in between parentheses...This would be the belief system that Borges parodies by imagining a map that is equal to the territory—if I control that map, I control the territory—. There is no other way, no one can tell me no." ["Comenté que su posición me recordaba al mapa de Jorge Luis Borges, mapa que se confundía con el territorio. Con ello aludí metafóricamente al hecho de que la posición de Carlos respondía a la creencia de la objetividad sin paréntesis, en tanto que mi posición partía de un sentido de la objetividad entre paréntesis…Este sería el sistema de creencias que parodia Borges imaginando un mapa que es igual al territorio —si yo controlo ese mapa, controlo el territorio—. No hay otra, nadie me puede decir que no."] ("Revisando" 329). The cartographer of the story is a perfect example of the "omphalos syndrome," about which Mignolo observes: "I soon learned that the omphalos syndrome governing territorial descriptions, both in its special aspects (people believing that they are at the center of the world) as well as its religious ones (people believing that they have been divinely appointed)…was actually quite widespread" (*The Darker Side of Western Modernity* 227).

As with the Sephardic names Abarvanel, Pinedo and Acevedo evoked in Borges's poem "A Key in Salonika," the name Suárez Miranda is deeply symbolic. Both "Suárez" and "Miranda" bring to mind Buenos Aires's early history as a colony of the Spanish empire. Martín Suárez de Toledo (1520-1584) governed Paraguay and the River Plate region for five years (1569-1574) during the sixteenth century. He was an ancestor of María del Carmen Lafinur Pinedo (1808-1876), Borges's great-grandmother from his father's side (Barnatán 17). Borges was also related to Manuel Isidoro Suárez, who was born in 1799 and was the grandfather of Borges's mother Leonor Acevedo Suárez. Borges commemorates Isidoro's role in the independence wars against Spain in three different poems.[313] The name "Suárez" thus reminds us that Borges could find among his ancestors both Spanish conquistadors and Argentines who fought for the independence of Argentina. The name "Miranda" is better known than "Suárez" because it brings to mind Luis Miranda de Villafañe (d. 1575), a priest, poet and conquistador who was among the first Spaniards to ever set foot in the region we now call Buenos Aires. His *Romance* (c. 1540) memorably describes how hunger forced the Spanish conquistadors to eat each other. The motif of cannibalism would continue to reverberate in Buenos Aires's foundational narratives to finally become part of the national popular lore, and of Borges's poem on the mythical foundation of Buenos Aires.[314]

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[313] The poems in which Borges commemorates Suárez are: "Inscripción sepulcral" ("Sepulchral Inscription") from *Fervor of Buenos Aires* (1923), "Una página para conmemorar al Coronel Suárez, victorioso en Junín" ("A Page to Commemorate Colonel Suárez, Victor at Junín") from *The Other, The Same* (1964) and "Coronel Suárez" ("Colonel Suárez") from *The Iron Coin* (1976).

[314] Ulrich Schmidel (c. 1510-c. 1579), a German mercenary who participated with Miranda in the first frustrated expedition to Buenos Aires (1535-36), includes the episode of conquistadors eating each other in his memories on the trip. A century later, the motif is used again by the cleric Martín del Barco Centenera (1535-c.1602) in a poem which is foundational in Argentine history because of the use of the denomination "Argentina": *Argentina y conquista del Río de la Plata, con otros acaecimientos de los reinos del Perú, Tucumán y estado del Brasil* (*Argentina and the Conquest of the Río de la Plata, with Other Events from the Kingdoms of Peru, Tucuman and the State of Brazil*) (1602). The trope of the hungry conquistador would appear in a story written by Borges's friend Manuel Mujica Láinez (1910-1984) titled "El hambre" ("The Hunger"), included in his popular anthology *Misteriosa Buenos Ayres* (*Mysterious Buenos Aires*) (1950). Fray Luis de Miranda also shows up in the mysterious Buenos Aires of Mujica Láinez as the first poet of the city.

The Spanish empire, like the Sudanese wizard and Carlos Argentino Daneri, produces a failed world map, based on the certainty that the world is knowable-as-it-really-is. We are still left to wonder why a map parodying the universalizing aspirations of the Spanish empire is included alongside tales that evoke distinctive Islamicate imagery. When we turn our attention to geography—to the limits of geographical cannons—the reason behind this inclusion become clear. Two of the narratives of "Etcetera" remind us that Andalusia and Toledo were once part of an Islamicate empire, and it is from the region of al-Andalus that Spanish ships would sail to America. We already examined how the story of the Toledan Wizard who was made to wait could have been easily been told by Scheherazade. Borges's "Etcetera" situates al-Andalus within the fantasy geography of the *Nights* and also within the real geography of the medieval Mediterranean Islamicate empire where the tales of the *Nights* were first imagined and recited. "The Wizard That Was Made to Wait" takes place in medieval Toledo and incorporates visions set in Rome, a city with close connections to the Mediterranean. In "The Chamber of Statues," Andalusia is connected to the north of Africa—it features the conquest of al-Andalus from the north of Africa and then clarifies that the Andalusi treasures are buried in a pyramid. After this tale, the collection turns to a story from the *Nights* about a man from the north of Africa who travels to the region we now call Iran. It is titled "The Story of the Two Dreamers" and it centers on a "dreamer" from Egypt who travels to Persia and back. The cluster thus places medieval Iberia in dialogue with the Mediterranean areas that we now call Morocco, Egypt and Italy. It then connects the Mediterranean world with the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, with other tales that are set in the Islamicate world, including Sudan, Baghdad and Isfahan, in current Iran. We are thus invited, or forced, to shift the focus from the territory of Europe to the Mediterranean

basin and the web of connections this sea makes possible, and then, to cross the Atlantic with conquistadors like Suárez Miranda.

With this crossing of the Atlantic, "Etcetera" participates in a long tradition of drawing parallels between the Islamicate empire that conquered al-Andalus and the Spanish one that conquered America. Chapter 5 examined how "Averroes's Search" can be included in this tradition. The story starts in twelfth-century al-Andalus and ends in twentieth-century Argentina, and leaves the impression of an image of man writing long paragraphs—an image that opens the tale in twelfth-century Cordoba in the form of "Averroes" and closes in twentieth-century Buenos Aires in the form of "Borges." Both "Averroes" and "Borges" reflect on the fact that they talk and write in a language (Arabic or Spanish) that was born in the center of an empire, far from their place of birth. This evocation of images that first show up in al-Andalus and the regions which during the Middle Ages belonged to the Islamicate empire and later in Buenos Aires can also be seen in "The Aleph" and "The Zahir." "The Aleph" manages to place distinctively Andalusi architecture—an albarrana tower—in Buenos Aires while also insinuating an Argentine mirāj. The opening paragraph of "The Zahir" sets the tale in twentieth-century Buenos Aires, and also transports us from the north of India to Indonesia to Iran to Sudan to the Maghreb and to Cordoba:

> In Gujerat, at the end of the eighteenth century, the Zahir had been a tiger; in Java, it was a blind man in the Surakarta mosque, stoned by the Faithful; in Persia, an astrolabe that Nadir Shah ordered thrown into the sea; in the prisons of Mahdi, in 1892, a small sailor's compass, wrapped in a shred of cloth from a turban, that Rudolph Carl von Slatin touched; in the aljama in Córdoba it was, according to Zotenberg, a vein running through the marble in one of the twelve hundred pillars; in the guetto in Tetuán, the bottom of a well. ("The Aleph" 242)[315]

[315] "En Guzerat, a fines del siglo XVIII, un tigre fue Zahir; en Java, un ciego de la mezquita de Surakarta, a quien lapidaron los fieles; en Persia, un astrolabio que Nadir Shah hizo arrojar al fondo del mar; en las prisiones de Mahdí, hacia 1892, una pequeña brújula que Rudolf Carl von Slatin tocó, envuelta en un jirón de turbante; en la aljama de Córdoba, según Zotenberg, una veta en el mármol de uno de los mil doscientos pilares; en la judería de Tetuán, el

The 1954 version of "Etcetera" (the one which includes the impossible imperial map) along with "Averroes's Search," "The Zahir" and "The Aleph," all place certain imagery and objects in different regions that we usually associate with Islam—Islamicate imagery—before placing them in Buenos Aires. The same process occurs in the poem "Patriotic Music," in which "Moorish cries" from the north of Africa are transported to al-Andalus and then to Buenos Aires in order to eventually become part of tango music that, as we explored in Chapter 4, could in time be interlaced with other tunes in order to become Argentina's epic. In Chapter 4 we saw that tango music, to Borges, epitomizes Argentine music and culture, and that it not only reflects Moorish cries but is also informed by the traditions of Argentines of Northern European, African and Native descent. In Chapter 3 al-Andalus bridges the Mediterranean with Europe through a palimpsest that includes Arabic tales from the *Nights*, Sufi descriptions of the world of the afterlife and of beautiful women who are also God, Dante's *Commedia*, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and a story of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. According to Borges, al-Andalus also functions as a bridge between Mediterranean culture and Buenos Aires, thus creating a Mediterranean-Atlantic connection.

A palimpsest with Arabic and Spanish long paragraphs, Moorish cries, Alephes, Zahirs and albarrana towers dissolves distances to superimpose Andalusi and Argentine geographies. In the poem "Spain," Borges elaborates: Spain (of Islam and of the Kabbalah) "continues here in Buenos Aires, / in this evening of July of 1964" ("El otro" 309).[316] Even though sometimes "we"—Argentines—try to deny it, Spain is part of "us," and it is present "in the intimate habits of blood, / in the Acevedo and Suárez of my lineage" (309). In Borges's spiritual lineage, as in

fondo de un pozo" (Borges, "El Aleph" 589). I have respected the translation included in *Collected Fictions*, except that I replaced "synagogue" with "aljama."

316 "prosigue aquí, en Buenos Aires, / en este atardecer del mes de julio de 1964" (Borges, "El otro" 309).

that of many Argentines, we can find conquistadors and independence fighters, inquisitors and Sephardic Jews.[317]

[317] “en los íntimos hábitos de la sangre, / en los Acevedo y los Suárez de mi linaje” (Borges, “El otro” 309).

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Curriculum Vitae

Maria Ruhlmann was born and raised in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She received her J.D. from the Universidad de Buenos Aires, graduating in 2004 with a *Diploma de Honor* (Honor Diploma). In 2009 she received her LL.M. in International Legal Practice from the Instituto de Empresa, in Spain. She participated in exchange programs at Tulane University Law School in New Orleans and at the Marshall Wythe Law School of the College of William and Mary in Virginia. The Universidad de Buenos Aires, Tulane University and the Instituto de Empresa gave her awards for her academic performance. She began her doctoral studies in the Department of German and Romance Languages and Literatures at Johns Hopkins University in 2011. During her doctoral program she received the Johns Hopkins University's prestigious Dean's Teaching Fellowship. Her primary research interests include multiculturalism and medievalisms in the 20th-century Hispanic American context. Other research interests include gender studies and the relationship between law and literature.